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ENDING THE GEOGRAPHY OF RACISM
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LETTER TO LAURA BUSH
Sharon Olds

CURBING CORPORATE POWER
Ralph Nader

THE MYSTERY OF SAM COOKE
Robert Christgau

NOW THE REAL LOOTING BEGINS

PURGING THE POOR
by NAOMI KLEIN

BLACKWATER DOWN
by JEREMY SCAHILL

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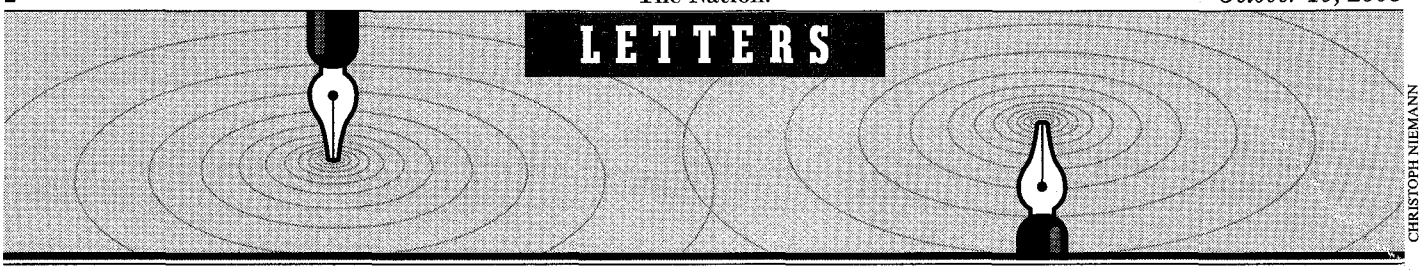

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

TEARS FOR NEW ORLEANS, AND US

Arlington, Mass.

■ As horrified as I was by the destruction in New Orleans and Bush's lack of understanding or caring, it wasn't until I read Patricia Williams's "The View From Lott's Porch" [Sept. 26] that tears ran down my face. The gall the right has shown is nothing less than sinful. We need to take our country back now! JAMES MITCHELL

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Cambridge, Mass.

■ I have always found images more powerful than words (which is probably why I'm an art historian), and I choked on the cover of the September 19 issue. You may have intended to say only that Alan Greenspan is too powerful (thus a king) and too conservative, but the picture is squarely in the tradition of anti-Semitic caricature and cartooning, especially that of the nineteenth century in France and the twentieth in Germany. I don't believe you wanted to convey that message but you did, powerfully.

JAMES ACKERMAN

THE ARTIST REPLIES

New York City

■ I have been a caricaturist for more than thirty years and am very familiar with this kind of response to caricatures of public figures who have recognizably ethnic features. Of course caricature is about exaggeration of features to make a point. In the past, racial caricatures were employed to make points about masses of people. Minstrel shows, vaudeville, *Puck*, *Harper's Weekly*, *Simplicissimus*, *Der Stürmer* were places it could be found with varying intensity and orientation. That world, I am happy to say, is dead and buried. Racial caricature is gone today in popular media, with the exception of groups parodying themselves, the only circumstance where it is now permissible. I make political art today, in the twenty-first century, under a strong belief that a caricature of an individual will be seen as just that. This caricature of Greenspan (done by yours truly, graduate of the Yeshiva of Kings Bay, Brooklyn, 1968) is as much an attack against Jews as a drawing of Bush is a caricature of all WASPs. STEVE BRODNER

SPEAKING OF ABORTION...

Oakland, Calif.

■ Katha Pollitt's well-written "Feminists for (Fetal) Life" ["Subject to Debate," Aug. 29/Sept. 5] contains a few discrepancies. Pollitt implies that Feminists for Life wants to make all abortion illegal without exception. Like the early American feminists who worked to enact legal protection from abortion, FFL does support legal protection for women and children. But FFL's work focuses on addressing the root causes that drive women to abortion. FFL is not a litigious group. Our advocacy work on college campuses, Capitol Hill and in the workplace focuses on resources and support for pregnant women and parents. If abortion becomes illegal, we don't want women driven to back-alley abortions because they still lack the financial resources and emotional support they deserve. The work of eliminating the root causes of abortion will continue whether abortion is legal or illegal.

Since we are both pro-woman and pro-life, we refuse to choose between women and children. FFL believes that physicians and other medical personnel should treat both patients and do what they can to save both of them. Situations in which pregnancy threatens the life of the mother are extremely rare. Late-term abortions are never medically necessary. Emergency C-sections are often the medically appropriate response to save both woman and child. Viability at this stage of the child's development is generally very good, especially with advances in neonatal care. Babies weighing less than a pound are surviving.

As for first-trimester scenarios, most are to save the woman from ectopic pregnancies. Since the child has no chance of survival, and the woman can survive if the pregnancy is ended, doctors must do what they can to save her. To let both die would not be pro-life. At this time, uterine transplants to re-implant the child in the womb are not possible, but if they become a viable option, it would have enormous ramifications for the abortion debate.

We do not support exceptions that discriminate against individuals with disabilities.

Pollitt's article suggests FFL wants doctors who perform abortions to serve prison terms. Imprisoning doctors is not a goal of FFL. Because FFL works to eliminate the root causes of abortion—primarily lack of practical resources and support—FFL would support legislation to punish people who pressure or coerce women into abortion. Legislators and judges will decide on an appropriate range of sentences for violating the law. These could include fines, community service or prison time.

Finally, Pollitt suggests that FFL admits there is no correlation between abortion and breast cancer. We do not. Scientists are divided about this. FFL believes that women deserve to know the truth, supports further research and proposes that pro-life and pro-choice researchers work side by side to discover the truth. We are not doctors, nor is FFL a medical research facility. FFL believes that women can handle the truth about their bodies and the impact of childbirth, miscarriage, abortion, etc.

VASU MURTI, *Feminists for Life Author,* The Liberal Case Against Abortion

Chicago

■ Katha Pollitt categorically denies that anyone who opposes abortion may qualify as a feminist. Yet from at least Mary Wollstonecraft until the 1960s, this was the majority position in British and American feminism at the very least. Early feminist leaders like Susan B. Anthony and Matilda Joslyn Gage opposed abortion as violence against fetal lives caused by violence against female lives: the denial of sexual/reproductive health education, including information about fetal development and family planning; the denial of the right to voluntary motherhood (achieved through voluntary abstinence, contraception and/or outercourse); women's economic disempowerment; men's sexual and parental irresponsibility and violence; and the utter dearth of social supports for mothers.

This analysis remains apt, as does their focus on the expansion of women's choices rather than the secondary issue of the law. Although pro-life feminists are an often disbelieved, excluded and censored minority in the United States today, we persist, and we are discovering feminists like us in other countries—like Kenya's Wangari Maathai. If Pollitt would look at the big picture of feminism, perhaps she would see that we are an integral part of its past, present and future.

MARY KRANE DERR
Co-editor, Prolife Feminism Yesterday and Today *(www.fnsa.org)*

Sacramento, Calif.

■ When it comes to the question of whether a woman should be able to obtain an abortion, labels like "feminist" and questions about "when does life begin" are side issues, diversions. In two sentences, this is what I think about the abortion question: When any government—whether federal, state, county, city or church government—denies any female access to birth control—whether the Pill, condoms, RU486, the morning-after pill or abortion—then that government is forcing that female to become a breeder. And that, my friends, is slavery.

From a mother of four, grandmother of two (so far) and a woman who has suffered five spontaneous abortions (miscarriages): I do know what I am talking about. GRACE COOPER

Portland, Ore.

■ How about this: Illegal abortion is terrorism against women, and the procedure done under those conditions is torture. Too much? Too

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EDITORIALS

Prez on the Precipice

Two-term presidencies rarely end on the twentieth day of January in the odd year following a national election. Rather, history tells us, they tend to flame out months—sometimes years—before the Oval Office officially changes hands. After a response to Hurricane Katrina that reinforced Americans' doubts about George W. Bush's competence and his caring, and with continuing turns for the worse in Iraq, the President has blundered toward the precipice of a prematurely finished presidency. But as history also tells us, presidencies don't plunge into political free-fall on their own. The opposition party must stoke public resentment and offer convincing alternatives to the Commander in Chief's failed vision.

Bush boosted his sagging approval ratings a bit by tarting up his Gulf Coast reconstruction plans in Franklin Roosevelt drag. But he's facing a revolt within his own party over what some see as an attempt to spend his way out of the doghouse. The danger for Democrats is that the debate over rebuilding New Orleans and the rest of the stricken region could play out as an intramural fight between a "compassionate" President and his fiscally conservative compatriots. That would leave Democrats where they were after the 9/11 terrorist attacks—as hapless allies with a President they are unwilling, or unsure of how, to challenge.

This is no time for such timidity. If Democrats want to get the better of Bush at last, and if they want to advance an agenda that could revitalize their party and their country, they must not get stuck between the Administration and its right flank. They must be blunt about the fact that while it has a big price tag, Bush's response to the Gulf Coast crisis is inadequate and irresponsible. The first step is fighting the President's decision to waive prevailing-wage laws on the Gulf Coast—a giveaway to contractors that denies displaced workers a chance to earn enough to piece their lives back together. Democrats should reject the President's attempts to ease environmental regulations in a region already ecologically devastated. They should back a proposal by Senator Russ Feingold and Representative John Conyers to delay the implementation of bankruptcy "reforms" that will make it tougher for Gulf Coast residents to get back on their feet. And they should launch a frontal assault on the tax policies of an Administration that has starved the government's capacity to provide basic protections and services. That means shooting down the President's proposal to eliminate estate taxes. It also means demanding that Bush be accountable for the $200 billion he has sunk into Iraq, with no end in sight.

At a time when savvy Republicans are starting to put distance between themselves and the President, Democrats have a chance to develop broad coalitions to demand accountability. Not just accountability for the occupation of Iraq and the campaign of calculated deceit that led us to war but for reckless tax cuts, environmental degradation and other domestic disasters this President has ushered in.

But pushing back against Bush's destructive policies is not enough. While Democrats expose and oppose the President's attempt to make the Gulf Coast a laboratory for conservative pet projects and crony capitalism, they must also lay out a full-scale reconstruction plan of their own—a "people's reconstruction" that advances a democratically accountable, economically viable, socially just and environmentally sustainable plan for regional rebuilding. By doing so, Democrats will accomplish something more lasting and important than nudging a faltering President over the precipice. They will identify their party as the credible alternative—the credible leader—it has failed to be for far too long.

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'One Nation, Fragmented'

It took Hurricane Katrina to remind the media and political establishment that there are poor people in America—37 million of them, according to the latest Census Bureau report, up 1.1 million from 2003 (the fourth consecutive year under George W. Bush during which the figure has risen). That the people left stranded without cars in storm-ravaged New Orleans were disproportionately poor and black is a shameful reminder of how the fault lines of race and class continue to determine which communities are most susceptible to risk.

Even so, it remains to be seen whether policy-makers will acknowledge that the inequities vividly captured on television after Katrina are neither confined to the Gulf region nor limited to moments when natural disasters strike. "The issues we are crying about in New Orleans are very severe, but they happen every day on a smaller scale in communities across America," notes Angela Glover Blackwell, the founder of Policylink, a nonprofit organization that advocates innovative ways to address regional inequities. It goes largely unnoticed when people living in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty lack access to safe parks and supermarkets that sell fresh vegetables; when their children register unusually high rates of asthma; when exclusionary land policies prevent people from moving out. Yet the cumulative toll of these man-made disparities is more deadly over time than the damage wrought by natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina. "Where you live in America is increasingly a proxy for opportunity," explains Blackwell. "It determines whether you grow up next to a toxic dump, whether you are near safe, accessible parks and sidewalks, whether your children go to good public schools, whether you have access to transportation and quality jobs, whether you live a healthy lifestyle, even how long you live."

Indeed, a June study found that in the Chicago area life expectancy in the more affluent Northwest Side was 75 to 80; the figure plummeted to 60 for blacks in the poorest neighborhoods on the South Side. As in New Orleans, the latter neighborhoods were not only disproportionately impoverished but also disproportionately African-American, thanks to decades of discriminatory housing policies and white flight from cities. "Blacks are about seven times more likely to live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty than whites," says John Powell, director of the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University.

It's for this reason that Powell told an interfaith coalition a few years ago that "the civil rights movement in the twenty-first century is about space"—that is, about undoing the patterns of residential segregation that have made poor black people increasingly invisible and isolated. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, conservatives like George Will have taken to blaming lax moral standards—too many single mothers and unsupervised teens—for conditions in inner-city neighborhoods like the Ninth Ward of New Orleans. Such behavioral arguments ignore the public policy decisions that have fueled the concentration of poverty in cities like New Orleans, which during the 1990s ranked second among all large metropolitan areas in terms of locating subsidized housing in extremely poor neighborhoods and first for locating

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such housing in predominantly black neighborhoods. In a study of how race and sprawl have shaped greater New Orleans, David Rusk, former mayor of Albuquerque and a leading advocate of more equitable regional development, found that 49 percent of the city's black residents in 1990 lived in high-poverty neighborhoods—communities where schools were overcrowded, the tax base was eroding and the streets were unsafe. Only 6 percent of whites lived in such neighborhoods. Rusk labeled these run-down areas "deadly communities," a term that might have acquired greater currency by now were the racial patterns reversed.

There is no shortage of examples indicating how to address such disparities. In Chicago the famous Gautreaux program, prompted by a class-action lawsuit, forced housing authorities there to move thousands of poor black families into predominantly white or racially mixed neighborhoods. Children from "Gautreaux families" who grew up in the suburbs were less likely to drop out of school, more likely to attend a four-year college and more likely to become employed full time than their urban peers, researchers found. In 1994 the Department of Housing and Urban Development launched the Moving to Opportunity for Fair Housing Demonstration, with the goal of relocating public-housing residents in several cities to less impoverished and segregated communities. Although data are preliminary, researchers report good results—less juvenile crime, lower asthma rates—among children in the families that moved.

In rebuilding areas damaged by Hurricane Katrina, a starting point should thus be inclusionary zoning and fair-share housing policies, which would insure that poor people are not concentrated in isolated pockets once again, says Policylink's Blackwell. Equally imperative are transportation policies that enable residents of central cities to get to jobs and opportunities even if—as New Orleans showed is common—they don't own cars. Two years ago a study by Good Jobs First, a public-interest group, found that not a single state in the country requires companies receiving public subsidies for economic development to set up shop at transit-accessible locations—this despite the fact that decades of sprawl have shifted more and more jobs to outer-ring suburbs that poor people can't reach. A third priority should be targeted investments that provide low-income communities with some of the amenities their more affluent neighbors take for granted, something numerous states have begun. Pennsylvania, for example, has launched a development initiative to build supermarkets in underserved communities through planning grants and low-interest loans. In 2002 California established school construction funds for critically overcrowded schools in low-income communities.

These, at least, are the possibilities. The Bush Administration, for its part, appears more interested in using the reconstruction of Mississippi and Louisiana as a laboratory for conservative ideas like waiving environmental regulations and scrapping minimum-wage laws. If that happens, it is virtually certain the benefits will go to companies like Bechtel that have received no-bid contracts, not poor people, and that America will remain, as Powell puts it, "one nation, fragmented," just as pre-Katrina New Orleans was.

EYAL PRESS

Eyal Press is a Nation *contributing writer.*

No Thanks, Mrs. Bush

For reasons spelled out below, the poet Sharon Olds has declined to attend the National Book Festival in Washington, which, coincidentally or not, takes place September 24, the day of an antiwar mobilization in the capital. Olds, winner of a National Book Critics Circle Award and professor of creative writing at New York University, was invited along with a number of other writers by First Lady Laura Bush to read from their works. Three years ago artist Jules Feiffer declined to attend the festival's White House breakfast as a protest against the Iraq War ("Mr. Feiffer Regrets," November 11, 2002). We suggest that invitees to this year's event consider following their example. —The Editors

Laura Bush
First Lady
The White House

Dear Mrs. Bush,

I am writing to let you know why I am not able to accept your kind invitation to give a presentation at the National Book Festival on September 24, or to attend your dinner at the Library of Congress or the breakfast at the White House.

In one way, it's a very appealing invitation. The idea of speaking at a festival attended by 85,000 people is inspiring! The possibility of finding new readers is exciting for a poet in personal terms, and in terms of the desire that poetry serve its constituents—all of us who need the pleasure, and the inner and outer news, it delivers.

And the concept of a community of readers and writers has long been dear to my heart. As a professor of creative writing in the graduate school of a major university, I have had the chance to be a part of some magnificent outreach writing workshops in which our students have become teachers. Over the years, they have taught in a variety of settings: a women's prison, several New York City public high schools, an oncology ward for children. Our initial program, at a 900-bed state hospital for the severely physically challenged, has been running now for twenty years, creating along the way lasting friendships between young MFA candidates and their students—long-term residents at the hospital who, in their humor, courage and wisdom, become our teachers.

When you have witnessed someone nonspeaking and almost nonmoving spell out, with a toe, on a big plastic alphabet chart, letter by letter, his new poem, you have experienced, close up, the passion and essentialness of writing. When you have held up a small cardboard alphabet card for a writer who is completely nonspeaking and nonmoving (except for the eyes), and pointed first to the A, then the B, then C, then D, until you get to the first letter of the first word of the first line of the poem she has been composing in her head all week, and she lifts her eyes when that letter is touched to say *yes*, you feel with a fresh immediacy the human drive for creation, self-expression, accuracy, honesty and wit—and the importance of writing, which celebrates the value of each person's unique story and song.

So the prospect of a festival of books seemed wonderful to

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me. I thought of the opportunity to talk about how to start up an outreach program. I thought of the chance to sell some books, sign some books and meet some of the citizens of Washington, DC. I thought that I could try to find a way, even as your guest, with respect, to speak about my deep feeling that we should not have invaded Iraq, and to declare my belief that the wish to invade another culture and another country—with the resultant loss of life and limb for our brave soldiers, and for the noncombatants in their home terrain—did not come out of our democracy but was instead a decision made "at the top" and forced on the people by distorted language, and by untruths. I hoped to express the fear that we have begun to live in the shadows of tyranny and religious chauvinism—the opposites of the liberty, tolerance and diversity our nation aspires to.

I tried to see my way clear to attend the festival in order to bear witness—as an American who loves her country and its principles and its writing—against this undeclared and devastating war.

But I could not face the idea of breaking bread with you. I knew that if I sat down to eat with you, it would feel to me as if I were condoning what I see to be the wild, highhanded actions of the Bush Administration.

What kept coming to the fore of my mind was that I would be taking food from the hand of the First Lady who represents the Administration that unleashed this war and that wills its continuation, even to the extent of permitting "extraordinary rendition": flying people to other countries where they will be tortured for us.

So many Americans who had felt pride in our country now feel anguish and shame, for the current regime of blood, wounds and fire. I thought of the clean linens at your table, the shining knives and the flames of the candles, and I could not stomach it.

Sincerely,
SHARON OLDS

CALVIN TRILLIN

GOVERNMENT'S THE PROBLEM

(A Chorus From the Bush Administration Sings Another Republican Sea Chantey)

We weren't impressed with FEMA when we came—
Too set on fitting jobs to skills precisely.
It's loyalty we needed at the top.
We thought a horse show judge would do
quite nicely.

'Cause government's the problem, lads,
Americans would all do well to shun it.
Yes, government's the problem, lads.
At least it is when we're the ones who run it.

And why should we have rushed in troops to help?
These people seem to think that they're our clients.
They're not. They got a little wet. So what?
America was built on self-reliance.

'Cause government's the problem, lads,
Americans would all do well to shun it.
Yes, government's the problem, lads.
At least it is when we're the ones who run it.

The Perils of UN Reform

All the talk at the United Nations for the past year has been about reform at September's World Summit. The campaign was ardently pushed by Secretary General Kofi Annan after the UN was ignored by the United States in its 2003 invasion of Iraq. Annan's ambitious reform agenda, designed to make the UN more indispensable, centered on the Security Council's role, genocide, nuclear threats, terrorism, pre-emptive war, human rights abuses, economic needs and UN management problems. Unfortunately, Annan's crusade came to a jolting halt at the recent gathering in New York.

The unexpressed hope had been that the leading liberal democracies of the world, drawing on Annan's proposals, would exchange their help in alleviating Third World poverty for the developing world's acceptance of the security, human rights and UN management changes they wanted. This would mean passing some or all of the following reforms: authorizing more direct UN intervention to stop genocide, nuclear proliferation and terrorism; restructuring the UN's lame Human Rights Commission; reorganizing the UN's faulty internal management system; and expanding aid abroad. But all these ran up against barriers of one sort or another.

First, the UN got waylaid by a fracas over the issue of expanding the Security Council. For most of the past six months, the controversy converged on a subject peripheral to the North-South deal but far more glamorous to the media. One group of nations—Japan, Germany, India and Brazil—made a joint effort to get onto the Council. However, the African Union rejected the initiative, and China, one of the Council's five veto-bearing countries, also objected to the quartet, especially to Japan. The United States, another permanent member, had reservations about Germany. If Japan and Germany couldn't make it, it seemed unlikely that any other states could gain permanent membership. And even if any did, would they also get the veto? And would expansion impede the effectiveness of the Council? Because of these nagging questions, Annan eventually decided to put off the issue until December. It is now unlikely that Security Council reform will happen at all.

In the meantime, UN diplomats were patiently stitching together a forty-page reform package. As they made progress, though, George W. Bush suddenly appointed UN antagonist John Bolton as UN ambassador in August. The notoriously combative Bolton, despite being a late entrant into the fray, demanded more than 700 changes to the document, including elimination of all

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Support the African American Community of New Orleans

Relief, Rebuilding and Community Control

As hurricane survivors cope with the devastating impact of Hurricane Katrina, please help ensure their needs are met and their voices are heard.

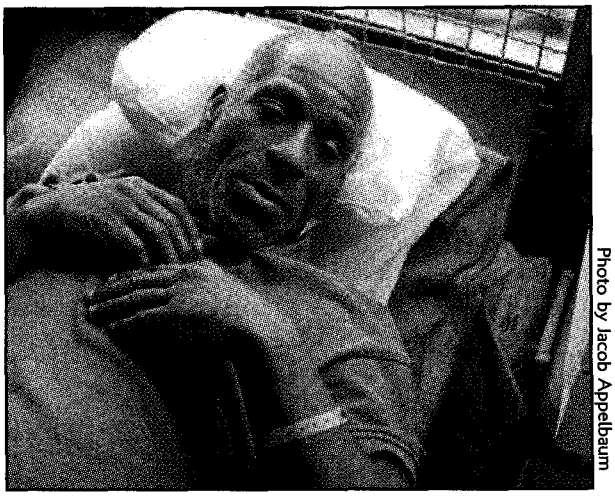


Photo by Jacob Appelbaum

Over 40 New Orleans and Gulf Coast community-based organizations, in collaboration with Community Labor United, Quality Education is a Civil Right, the Algebra Project, the Young People's Project, and the Vanguard Public Foundation, have founded the People's Hurricane Relief Fund in order to:

- Deploy hundreds of teacher volunteers to meet the educational needs of youth evacuees;
- Organize volunteers to help displaced families fill out paperwork and get through the red tape of applying for federal assistance and other funding;
- Organize health care workers and establish medical centers to care for the sick and injured;
- Establish four community service centers in Lake Charles, Houston, Baton Rouge and Jackson to take in and respond to requests from hurricane survivors and help them organize in their local communities to gain a voice in the rebuilding effort, and to hold government agencies accountable.

To support this effort, send tax-deductible donations to:

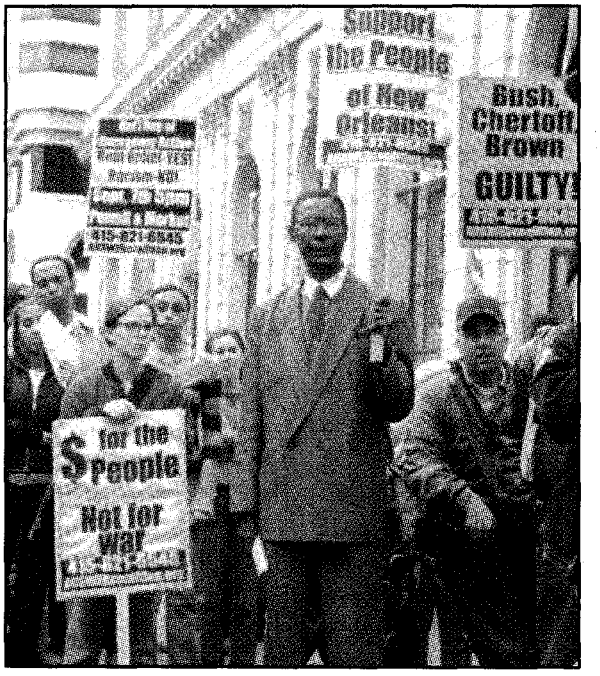
People's Hurricane Relief Fund
Vanguard Public Foundation
383 Rhode Island Street, Suite 301
San Francisco, CA 94103

The Vanguard Foundation strives to eradicate racism in all its manifestations and promote civil rights, economic justice, gender equality and community empowerment.

For more information call (415) 487-2111

Want to volunteer? Email Becky Belcore at bbelcore@hotmail.com

To donate on-line visit www.qecr.org



Community members in San Francisco demand relief for hurricane survivors and denounce the Bush Administration's failure to provide the massive relief that is so desperately needed.

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COMMENT

mention of the Millennium Development Goals the United States backed in 2000 to eradicate global poverty—the very reason for this summit—as well as all references to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the International Criminal Court, global warming and enhancement of the General Assembly's powers.

Bolton's deletions, reflecting the Bush Administration's continuing hostility to multilateralism, reopened the debate over reforms. The smaller nations, resentful of Bolton's intrusion, now jumped in with their own alterations. The unhappiness of those countries was especially acute over security, human rights and management proposals. The call for the UN to intervene in cases where a government may be committing massive human rights violations against its own people—the "responsibility to protect" provision—upset many weaker countries, who feared it might give the UN the right to meddle in their domestic affairs. Some smaller states were also troubled by a recommendation to replace the oversized and flawed Human Rights Commission with a reduced Human Rights Council. Systemic violators treasured the old setup, and poorer states were irritated by the fact that there would be fewer spots for them on the new council. There was also concern about a proposal to give the Secretary General more power over UN management, taking such authority away from the General Assembly. This could amplify the influence of big donors and diminish that of impoverished states. And some Arab nations opposed a redefinition of terrorism that would outlaw targeting civilians to intimidate governments, believing it would hamper legitimate Palestinian self-defense.

In the end, some reforms did survive—enough to give the patina of transfiguration without its substance. Limited new powers were given to Annan to make personnel changes; the definition of terrorism was partially expanded; some form of UN intervention, with "ifs" attached, was permitted against genocide; a Peacebuilding Commission and a Democracy Fund, two noncontroversial favorites of the Bush Administration, were adopted; and rich Western lands now went on record promising to aspire, on a voluntary basis, to give 0.7 percent of their annual GNP to poorer nations. But most ideas were watered down, as in the Human Rights Council, or dropped entirely, including several nonproliferation ventures.

The most interesting sideline at the UN was Bolton's role. After his dramatic appearance on the scene, bestriding the organization like a giant mustachioed tormentor, in the end Bolton compromised. The ordeal of negotiations temporarily defanged him. He was not able to issue threats or fire anybody or walk out. And the fact that he agreed to the modest deal thwarted the ambitions of his right-wing constituency in Washington; his settlement undermined arguments for legislation put forward by the reactionaries in Congress, primarily Representative Henry Hyde, that would have cut US dues in half if the UN did not pass thirty-two specific reforms by 2007.

What was overlooked during this struggle is that the UN Charter has actually changed a lot over the years without formal votes. This is most evident at the Security Council, which has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Under that rubric the Council has adopted all sorts of measures that were never mentioned in the original charter: peacekeeping, peace enforcement, cease-fires, election monitoring, constitution writing, nation-building, preventive diplomacy, arms inspections, military training and so on.

Nonetheless, there will now be a second stage for formal reform. Many UN members hope that an infusion of political energy generated in recent months will carry into the new General Assembly session. Some of the crucial alterations that remain include: fleshing out a Human Rights Council with specifics on how many members there will be and how they are chosen; enacting various nuclear nonproliferation measures; making obligatory the largesse of richer nations to poorer ones; upgrading Annan's hiring and firing authority; widening the definition of terrorism; and reconfiguring the Security Council.

Pro-UN activists must be prepared to argue that virtual nonsuccess at the September summit does not make for a crippled or defunct body. After all, the UN now maintains sixteen peacekeeping missions; it has led the efforts to recover from the Asian tsunami; it has overseen elections in Iraq; and it is hunting down the assassins of a Lebanese leader who opposed Syria. It also handles transnational issues like environmental degradation, sexual trafficking, drug smuggling, nuclear proliferation and AIDS. It continues to serve as a round-the-clock diplomatic forum to stave off conflicts. But even if all the reforms are enacted, this would not make the UN act differently on catastrophes like Darfur. In such crises the organization's effectiveness is dependent on the political will of the member states to mobilize, equip and fund it.

For those attempting to improve the UN, the key word should now be caution. In the past, UN reform has always been incremental. At a minimum, Americans should feel some satisfaction that after sixty years there still exists a collective security body that on so many occasions has fulfilled the mission of its founders to eliminate conflict. STEPHEN SCHLESINGER

Stephen Schlesinger, author of Act of Creation *(Westview), on the founding of the United Nations, is the director of the World Policy Institute at the New School.*

(Continued on Page 26)

PINOCHET'S WEEK IN COURT

On September 14 the Chilean Supreme Court ruled that Augusto Pinochet could be stripped of his immunity and prosecuted for the crimes of Operation Colombo—a macabre effort by his secret police to cover up the disappearances of 119 leftists. To make the disappeared in effect reappear, Pinochet's agents placed on the streets of Buenos Aires unrecognizable, mutilated bodies tagged with the names of the missing and then planted propaganda indicating that those missing had been killed by fellow leftists.

On September 15, however, the Court issued a procedural ruling that makes it far less likely that Pinochet will be prosecuted for international terrorism crimes related to Operation Condor. Pinochet faces additional charges related to financial corruption and tax evasion.

—PETER KORNBLUH

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Q: Why do more than 900,000 teenagers sell drugs[1] but not alcohol or cigarettes?

A: Because alcohol and tobacco are regulated and sold through stores.

According to the federally funded Monitoring the Future Survey, "Marijuana has been almost universally available to American high school seniors over at least the past 28 years."[2]

Since 1972 marijuana use by teenagers has increased from 14%[3] to today where 16% of 8th graders and 45% of 12th graders have tried pot.[4] In contrast, daily cigarette use by high school seniors has declined from 27% in 1975[5] to 16% in 2004![6]

Credible education — as opposed to exaggerated claims — actually works! Prohibition makes things worse: more availability, more violence, unidentifiable and possibly impure drugs, and a system that exploits teens to enrich drug dealers.

Marijuana prohibition puts our kids at risk — just as alcohol prohibition did.

COMMON SENSE FOR DRUG POLICY
H. Michael Gray, Chair; Robert E. Field, Co-Chair
www.CommonSenseForDrugPolicy.org , www.DrugWarFacts.org,
www.ManagingPain.org, www.DrugWarDistortions.org, www.AddictInTheFamily.org

Notes:
1) "Alcohol Use and Delinquent Behaviors among Youths," April 2005, SAMHSA, USDHHS. 2) Monitoring the Future, "National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975-2003: Volume I," 2004. 3) "Marihuana: A Signal of Misunderstanding," Natl. Comm. on Marihuana & Drug Abuse, March 1972. 4) Monitoring the Future, "Overview of Key Findings 2004," 2005 5) Monitoring the Future, "National Survey Results." 6) Monitoring the Future, "Overview."

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JONATHAN SCHELL

Talks Without End

On September 19 at the six-party talks in Beijing, North Korea and the United States signed a "joint statement" in which North Korea committed itself to "abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs" and rejoining the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. For its part the United States agreed to "respect" North Korea's "sovereignty" and "discuss at an appropriate time the subject of the provision of a light-water reactor." Initially, this seemed cause for celebration, especially by those who had opposed the Bush Administration's hard-line policy and had favored negotiations. A *New York Times* editorial, for instance, stated, "Diplomacy, it seems, does work after all."

The next day, however, the picture changed radically. The joint statement—*not* a treaty—had left almost all questions of timing and even of concrete substance up in the air. As Fred Kaplan pointed out in *Slate*, the disarmament was to be accomplished only "at an early date," while the discussions (not the provision) on the light-water reactor were to begin "at an appropriate time"—two masterpieces of imprecision, especially in combination. For the United States, which has long adamantly opposed providing any reactor, an appropriate date might be the year 2300, or such time as the regime of North Korea's President Kim Jong Il has collapsed, or never. But then North Korea's official news service announced, in its characteristic vividly insulting prose, that "the U.S. should not even dream of the issue of [North Korea's] dismantlement of its nuclear deterrent before providing" a light-water reactor.

The challenge was fundamental—an obvious deal-breaker, not only for the Bush Administration but surely for any imaginable US Administration. The United States is hardly likely to provide nuclear technology to Kim Jong Il—a dictator George W. Bush has said he "loathes" and, North Korean style, called a "pygmy"—as long as he possesses nuclear arms. Nevertheless, in statements as surprising in their way as North Korea's bombshell, the United States made light of the news. "I think we will not get hung up on this statement," Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said offhandedly. "We will stick to the text of the Beijing statement, and I believe we can make progress if everybody sticks to what was actually agreed to." (Of course, the written agreement in fact has nothing to stick to, as it deliberately left all questions of timing up in the air.) The United States' chief negotiator, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, was even more insouciant. In an interview on *The NewsHour With Jim Lehrer*, he called North Korea's defiance "inconvenient"—twice, so no one could doubt that the word had been chosen carefully.

What is going on? Why did the tiny, poor dictatorship, proud possessor of a small nuclear arsenal, on one day agree to give it up and the next throw up a fatal obstacle to the process, and why did the world's self-described superpower and scourge of dictatorships and "evil" smile and pretend that nothing had happened?

A conventional interpretation might hold that the promises of both sides are sincere, but as in many negotiations, the path is rocky. We can hope that is so. But another view is possible. Sometimes the continuation of more or less open-ended negotiations is itself a goal of one or both parties. In the current case, both sides had in fact reached an impasse in their policies. The Bush Administration, after all, had once had a very clear and resolute global antiproliferation policy. It was military pre-emption and "regime change." The policy was announced with fanfare by Bush in his 2002 State of the Union address, in which he said, "The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons"—and named Iraq, Iran and North Korea as the prime offenders, linking them as the "axis of evil." At the top of the list was Iraq, against which war was duly waged. That war has failed decisively, and in at least two ways. First, weapons of mass destruction—the war's justification—of course have not been found, and, second, the US military machine has been stretched to the breaking point. It is not fit for further wars, whether in the name of nonproliferation or anything else.

For the Iraq War was never only about Iraq. It was also a demonstration project for the wider policy of stopping proliferation and otherwise extending American power by military means. To understand the Bush Administration's predicament now, we have to imagine what the situation would have been if the Iraq War had gone as the Administration hoped—if the WMD had been present and duly removed and the regime replaced by an acceptable new one. In that case, there is every reason to suppose that the United States would now be turning the screws on North Korea. Or it would perhaps have done so as early as 2003, after the troops had quit the flower-strewn streets of Iraq. Certainly, the White House would not now be swallowing North Korean insults in its eagerness to get back to negotiations.

North Korea, for its part, had for most of this time played its hand more successfully. While the United States was failing in Iraq, North Korea was withdrawing from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, turning the plutonium in its reactor into bomb-grade materials, and most likely creating a parallel uranium enrichment program and building up its nuclear arsenal, and announcing itself to be a nuclear power—all without receiving so much as a slap on the wrist from the international community. But more recently that policy, too, was threatening to exact a cost. If the six-party talks broke down and North Korea were held responsible, then international sanctions might follow. Military action by the United States, though unlikely, could not be altogether ruled out. The solution? A "breakthrough" that was not a true breakthrough, a "road map" (to borrow a relevant phrase from the Middle East) faint and vague enough to provide obstacles for infinite delays. Meanwhile, the nuclear buildup could proceed.

The high hopes raised by the agreement may one day be realized. For now, the United States and North Korea have succeeded only in creating, each for its own reasons, the appearance of an agreement. They do not yet have an agreement.

Jonathan Schell is The Nation Institute's Harold Willens Peace Fellow.

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What lies behind the scientific breakthroughs of the last 500 years?

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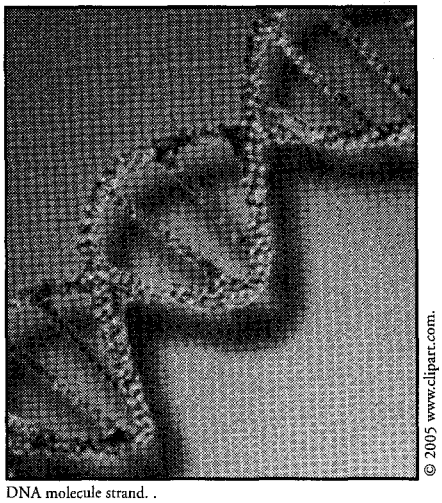
A research scientist, professor, and advisor to public television's NOVA science series, Dr. Hazen helped draft the *National Science Education Standards* (National Academy of Sciences, 1997). These Standards represent a consensus among thousands of scientists and educators regarding the most effective approaches for teaching and learning about science.



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DNA molecule strand. .

These lectures have been specifically designed to introduce and review all of the scientific principles that are included in the Content Standards portion of the *National Science Education Standards.*

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Dr. Hazen cites four reasons why you should strive to become scientifically literate:

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45 Life's Molecular Building Blocks
46 Proteins
47 Cells—The Chemical Factories of Life
48 Gregor Mendel, Founder of Genetics
49 The Discovery of DNA
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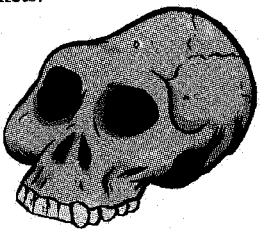
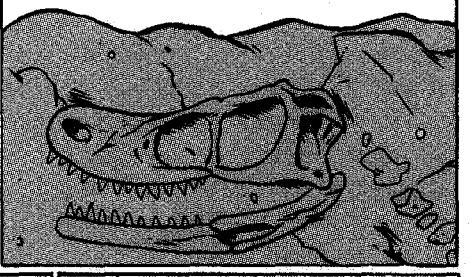
pg. 19

Here is a skull of one of the first human beings from nearly 5,000 years ago! This wicked man was killed in the Great Flood. Note the deformed skull due to rickets.



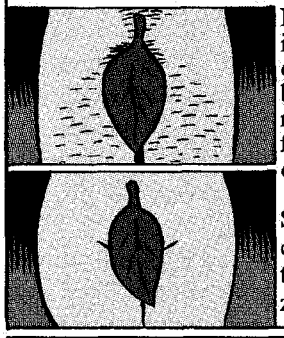
pg. 37

Dinosaurs also perished in the Great Flood. Unfortunately they were just too big for Noah's ark. The weight of all that water must have fossilized them.



pg. 97

HUMAN ANATOMY



Note the incredible difference between male and female sex organs.

Scientists call this the 'no-no' zone.

pg. 102

CHAPTER 5
Sexual Intercourse

A man [redacted] and [redacted] a woman [redacted] must [redacted] ma[redacted]r [redacted] ry [redacted] before sex.

A condom does nothing

A woman should consult a [redacted] man [redacted] before any [redacted] thing [redacted]

[redacted] get [redacted] fide [redacted] the [redacted] a [redacted] Wh [redacted] in [redacted]

pg. 132

Know Your Biology!

The Gay Plague (or AIDS as it is sometimes called) is easily transferred through sweat. If a sweaty gay* is near you, go and find an adult.

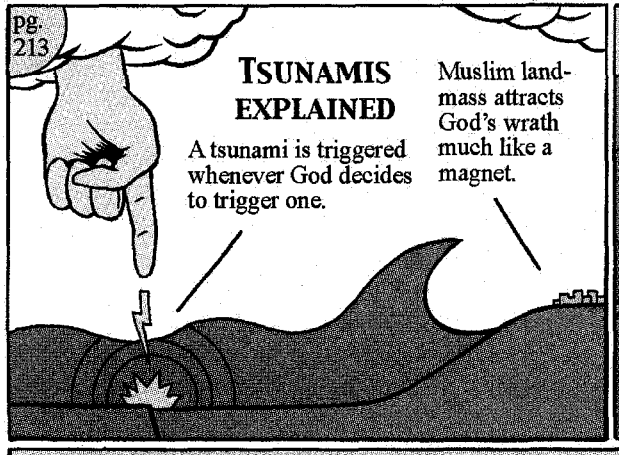
*some appear normal, use caution

pg. 213

TSUNAMIS EXPLAINED

A tsunami is triggered whenever God decides to trigger one.

Muslim land-mass attracts God's wrath much like a magnet.



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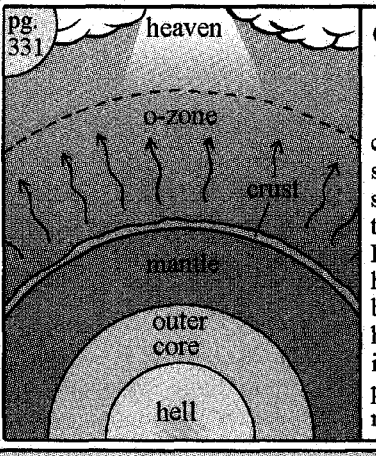

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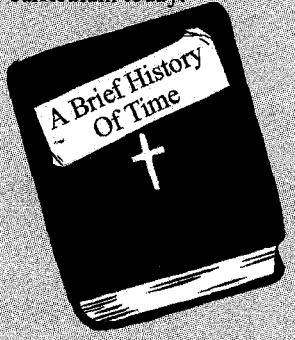
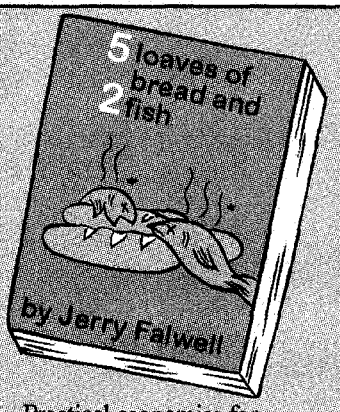
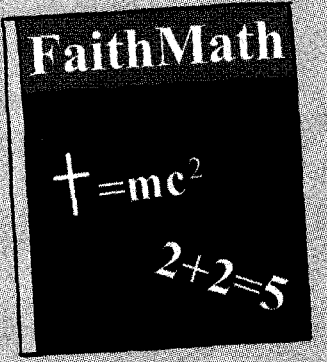


No quantum uncertainties here!



Practical economics for the practical mind.



A double-plus good book.

MATT BORS

Matt Bors's weekly cartoon strip Idiot Box *runs in newsweeklies around the country (www.mattbors.com).*

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ERIC ALTERMAN

New Orleans Is Us

Former Nixon Administration felon turned evangelical preacher Charles Colson recently claimed on his talk-radio program that God "allowed" Katrina to happen as a reminder of the importance of the war on terror and "to get our attention so that we don't delude ourselves into thinking that all we have to do is put things back the way they were and life will be normal again."

I don't approve, but I do see the logic. Katrina has forced open a window through which the media have finally glimpsed the Bush Administration's spectacular incompetence at keeping Americans safe and secure. The evidence had been there for years, but most reporters missed it, hidden as it was by a fog of rhetoric, ideology, political intimidation and tabloidization. But Bush's popularity has nose-dived, Cheney is nowhere to be seen and Karl Rove's curtain has been drawn aside to reveal a plump, powerless wizard whose only talent rests in the realm of illusion. Katrina has also demonstrated how ludicrous it was that in 2004 Bush managed to win his first genuine presidential election victory by playing the "security" card.

In the hurricane's wake, reporters for the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* have all taken the opportunity to delve into local, state and federal plans for emergency evacuation. The "plan" in each case is exactly the same: chaos. Thanks to this Administration's inexplicable insouciance—together with media's inability or unwillingness to call our attention to it—millions of Americans will die unnecessarily in the event of, say, an attack on a New Jersey chemical plant or a New York nuclear reactor or a devastating earthquake in San Francisco.

I first became aware of the Administration's near-criminal negligence toward this most crucial aspect of its post-9/11 mandate when *The New Republic*'s Jonathan Chait wrote a devastating exposé titled "The 9/10 President" in March 2003. Not only was the Administration ignoring the basics; it was actively sabotaging bipartisan Congressional efforts to begin to do what was necessary, lest the cost encroach on either its war plans or tax cuts. As Chait wrote, "Bush's record on homeland security ought to be considered a scandal. Yet, not only is it not a scandal, it's not even a story, having largely failed to register with the public, the media, or even the political elite."

Since then, I have picked up report after maddening report documenting the sorry state of homeland security. I read in *Congressional Quarterly*, "According to the administration's own budget documents, the Bush plan for funding first responders amounts to double-entry bookkeeping: changes in the ledger that would result in no net increase in the amount of federal funding flowing to cities, counties, and states." I read, according to the Partnership for Public Service, "Perhaps more than any other terrorist threat, bioterrorism will place huge burdens on small pools of medical, scientific and technical expertise. These organizations are already exhibiting hairline cracks—some would say fractures—that may presage disaster." I read, according to the Brookings Institution, "The United States is, at the moment, not well prepared to manage [an emergency] evacuation of this sort in the relevant time frame.... The federal government currently lacks the ability to [rapidly] generate and broadcast specific, geographically tailored evacuation instructions" across the country. I read, according to the Council on Foreign Relations, "America remains dangerously unprepared to prevent and respond to a catastrophic terrorist attack on U.S. soil." And finally, I read, according to the Progressive Policy Institute, "The administration has failed to adequately fund a number of essential homeland security functions. In the absence of presenting a compelling vision of the changes necessary to protect the homeland, the Bush administration has failed to push back on the government bureaucracies that have resisted meaningful change. In short, President Bush has failed to fulfill his promise to make homeland security his top priority." (In 2002, it is sad to say, before Bush and "Brownie" had their way with FEMA, Brookings had occasion to praise the agency for being a very effective arm of the government during its years of "determined effort" aiding the victims of catastrophic disasters like hurricanes, floods and forest fires.)

That our ports and nuclear and chemical facilities remain unprotected and that no serious plans have been made to save American lives in a post-attack environment might be considered news by some. That homeland security has become just one more spare rib in the Republican pork barrel—doled out in greater measure to the citizens of Montana than New York City, Los Angeles or Washington—might have been viewed as a scandal on the order of, I dunno, a missing blonde in Aruba or the ravings of a mad movie star on Oprah Winfrey's couch. Trudy Lieberman, writing in the *Columbia Journalism Review* last year, looked at this question and found "coverage of the effort to prevent another 9/11 has been spotty, episodic, reactive, and shallow." She points to problems in covering a story that's complex and bureaucratic, without a clear narrative. But there's another problem with covering the story as well. As the Center for American Progress has laid out, the Administration chose to fund its disastrous war in Iraq at a cost of billions of dollars instead of investing that money, and human resources, in protecting our nation. Point that out too loudly, however, and the Rove/Sullivan/Hitchens Axis of Ideological Correctness beat their chests and accuse you of aiding terrorists and hating America.

The deadly bungling in Louisiana and Mississippi that so shocked Americans would not have been so surprising had the media paid more attention to the combination of ideological obsession, incompetence and dishonesty that has characterized not merely the Iraq War but also this Administration's economic policies, its environmental policies—indeed, its entire faith-based governing philosophy. In New Orleans you see the results.

Seen in the context of Administration planning, New Orleans was not an unpredictable disaster—it was a model. And when the next disaster comes, we will all be under water. ■

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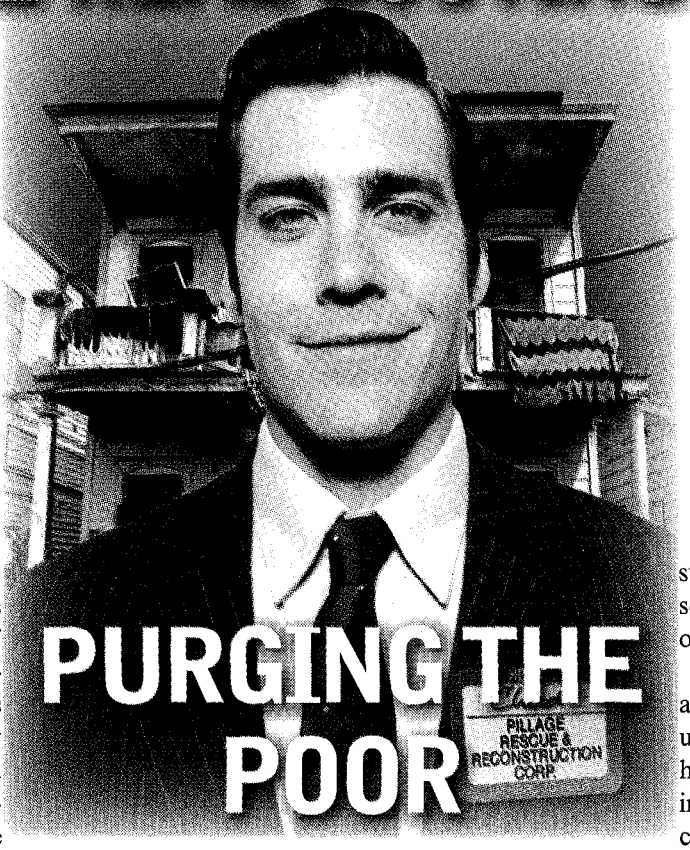
ARTICLES

NOW THE REAL LOOTING BEGINS



PURGING THE POOR

by Naomi Klein

Outside the 2,000-bed temporary shelter in Baton Rouge's River Center, a Church of Scientology band is performing a version of Bill Withers's classic "Use Me"—a refreshingly honest choice. "If it feels this good getting used," the Scientology singer belts out, "just keep on using me until you use me up."

Ten-year-old Nyler, lying face down on a massage table, has pretty much the same attitude. She is not quite sure why the nice lady in the yellow SCIENTOLOGY VOLUNTEER MINISTER T-shirt wants to rub her back, but "it feels so good," she tells me, so who really cares? I ask Nyler if this is her first massage. "Assist!" hisses the volunteer minister, correcting my Scientology lingo. Nyler shakes her head no; since fleeing New Orleans after a tree fell on her house, she has visited this tent many times, becoming something of an assist-aholic. "I have nerves," she explains in a blissed-out massage voice. "I have what you call nervousness."

Wearing a donated pink T-shirt with an age-inappropriate slogan ("It's the hidden little Tiki spot where the island boys are hot, hot, hot"), Nyler tells me what she is nervous about. "I think New Orleans might not ever get fixed back." "Why not?" I ask, a little surprised to be discussing reconstruction politics with a preteen in pigtails. "Because the people who know how to fix broken houses are all gone."

I don't have the heart to tell Nyler that I suspect she is on to something; that many of the African-American workers from her neighborhood may never be welcomed back to rebuild their city. An hour earlier I had interviewed New Orleans' top corporate lobbyist, Mark Drennen. As president and CEO of Greater New Orleans Inc., Drennen was in an expansive mood, pumped up by signs from Washington that the corporations he represents—everything from Chevron to Liberty Bank to Coca-Cola—were about to receive a package of tax breaks, subsidies and relaxed regulations so generous it would make the job of a lobbyist virtually obsolete.

Listening to Drennen enthuse about the opportunities opened up by the storm, I was struck by his reference to African-Americans in New Orleans as "the minority community." At 67 percent of the population, they are in fact the clear majority, while whites like Drennen make up just 27 percent. It was no doubt a simple verbal slip, but I couldn't help feeling that it was also a glimpse into the desired demographics of the new-and-improved city being imagined by its white elite, one that won't have much room for Nyler or her neighbors who know how to fix houses. "I honestly don't know and I don't think anyone knows how they are going to fit in," Drennen said of the city's unemployed.

New Orleans is already displaying signs of a demographic shift so dramatic that some evacuees describe it as "ethnic cleansing." Before Mayor Ray Nagin called for a second evacuation, the people streaming back into dry areas were mostly white, while those with no homes to return to are overwhelmingly black. This, we are assured, is not a conspiracy; it's simple geography—a reflection of the fact that wealth in New Orleans buys altitude. That means that the driest areas are the whitest (the French Quarter is 90 percent white; the Garden District, 89 percent; Audubon, 86 percent; neighboring Jefferson Parish, where people were also allowed to return, 65 percent). Some dry areas, like Algiers, did have large low-income African-American populations before the storm, but in all the billions for reconstruction, there is no budget for transportation back from the far-flung shelters where those residents ended up. So even when resettlement is permitted, many may not be able to return.

As for the hundreds of thousands of residents whose low-lying homes and housing projects were destroyed by the flood, Drennen points out that many of those neighborhoods were

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dysfunctional to begin with. He says the city now has an opportunity for "twenty-first-century thinking": Rather than rebuild ghettos, New Orleans should be resettled with "mixed income" housing, with rich and poor, black and white living side by side.

What Drennen doesn't say is that this kind of urban integration could happen tomorrow, on a massive scale. Roughly 70,000 of New Orleans' poorest homeless evacuees could move back to the city alongside returning white homeowners, without a single new structure being built. Take the Lower Garden District, where Drennen himself lives. It has a surprisingly high vacancy rate—17.4 percent, according to the 2000 Census. At that time 702 housing units stood vacant, and since the market hasn't improved and the district was barely flooded, they are presumably still there and still vacant. It's much the same in the other dry areas: With landlords preferring to board up apartments rather than lower rents, the French Quarter has been half-empty for years, with a vacancy rate of 37 percent.

As Bush says, lands swept clean are 'opportunity zones,' a chance to do some recruiting, advance the faith, rewrite the rules.

The citywide numbers are staggering: In the areas that sustained only minor damage and are on the mayor's repopulation list, there are at least 11,600 empty apartments and houses. If Jefferson Parish is included, that number soars to 23,270. With three people in each unit, that means homes could be found for roughly 70,000 evacuees. With the number of permanently homeless city residents estimated at 200,000, that's a significant dent in the housing crisis. And it's doable. Democratic Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, whose Houston district includes some 150,000 Katrina evacuees, says there are ways to convert vacant apartments into affordable or free housing. After passing an ordinance, cities could issue Section 8 certificates, covering rent until evacuees find jobs. Jackson Lee says she plans to introduce legislation that will call for federal funds to be spent on precisely such rental vouchers. "If opportunity exists to create viable housing options," she says, "they should be explored."

Malcolm Suber, a longtime New Orleans community activist, was shocked to learn that thousands of livable homes were sitting empty. "If there are empty houses in the city," he says, "then working-class and poor people should be able to live in them." According to Suber, taking over vacant units would do more than provide much-needed immediate shelter: It would move the poor back into the city, preventing the key decisions about its future—like whether to turn the Ninth Ward into marshland or how to rebuild Charity Hospital—from being made exclusively by those who can afford land on high ground. "We have the right to fully participate in the reconstruction of our city," Suber says. "And that can only happen if we are back inside." But he concedes that it will be a fight: The old-line families in Audubon and the Garden District may pay lip service to "mixed income" housing, "but the Bourbons uptown would have a conniption if a Section 8 tenant moved in next door. It will certainly be interesting."

Equally interesting will be the response from the Bush Administration. So far, the only plan for homeless residents to move back to New Orleans is Bush's bizarre Urban Homesteading Act. In his speech from the French Quarter, Bush made no mention of the neighborhood's roughly 1,700 unrented apartments and instead proposed holding a lottery to hand out plots of federal land to flood victims, who could build homes on them. But it will take months (at least) before new houses are built, and many of the poorest residents won't be able to carry the mortgage, no matter how subsidized. Besides, it barely touches the need: The Administration estimates that in New Orleans there is land for only 1,000 "homesteaders."

The truth is that the White House's determination to turn renters into mortgage payers is less about solving Louisiana's housing crisis than indulging an ideological obsession with building a radically privatized "ownership society." It's an obsession that has already come to grip the entire disaster zone, with emergency relief provided by the Red Cross and Wal-Mart and reconstruction contracts handed out to Bechtel, Fluor, Halliburton and Shaw—the same gang that spent the past three years getting paid billions while failing to bring Iraq's essential services to prewar levels [see Klein, "The Rise of Disaster Capitalism," May 2]. "Reconstruction," whether in Baghdad or New Orleans, has become shorthand for a massive uninterrupted transfer of wealth from public to private hands, whether in the form of direct "cost plus" government contracts or by auctioning off new sectors of the state to corporations.

This vision was laid out in uniquely undisguised form during a meeting at the Heritage Foundation's Washington headquarters on September 13. Present were members of the House Republican Study Committee, a caucus of more than 100 conservative lawmakers headed by Indiana Congressman Mike Pence. The group compiled a list of thirty-two "Pro-Free-Market Ideas for Responding to Hurricane Katrina and High Gas Prices," including school vouchers, repealing environmental regulations and "drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge." Admittedly, it seems farfetched that these would be adopted as relief for the needy victims of an eviscerated public sector. Until you read the first three items: "Automatically suspend Davis-Bacon prevailing wage laws in disaster areas"; "Make the entire affected area a flat-tax free-enterprise zone"; and "Make the entire region an economic competitiveness zone (comprehensive tax incentives and waiving of regulations)." All are poised to become law or have already been adopted by presidential decree.

In their own way the list-makers at Heritage are not unlike the 500 Scientology volunteer ministers currently deployed to shelters across Louisiana. "We literally followed the hurricane," David Holt, a church supervisor, told me. When I asked him why, he pointed to a yellow banner that read, SOMETHING CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT. I asked him what "it" was and he said "everything."

So it is with the neocon true believers: Their "Katrina relief" policies are the same ones trotted out for every problem, but nothing energizes them like a good disaster. As Bush says, lands swept clean are "opportunity zones," a chance to do some recruiting, advance the faith, even rewrite the rules from scratch. But that, of course, will take some massaging—I mean assisting. ■

Research assistance provided by Aaron Maté.

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Unequal (Part 1)

by Melissa Farley

This article responds to Debbie Nathan's "Oversexed" (The Nation, *August 29, 2005). Nathan sympathizes with those on the Left who consider prostitution a form of labor rather than violence against women. Nathan criticizes abolitionist feminists who think that women in prostitution deserve more in life than a condom and a cup of coffee. We feminists think that women deserve the right NOT to prostitute. That's what almost all women in prostitution tell us they want: to get out. We also think that HIV prevention funds should not be used to promote legalized prostitution.*

In 1993 in *The Nation*, Lillian S. Robinson's co-researcher Ryan Bishop says to her, "You have to [visit the Thai sex industry]... You have to go there the way you have to visit Dachau."

In 1996, Robert I. Friedman's "India's Shame: Sexual Slavery and Political Corruption are Creating an AIDS Catastrophe" in *The Nation* described the business of sexual exploitation in India that is paradigmatic of the sex industry worldwide, including the United States. He documents criminal gangs' control of prostitution in India and describes a "medical holocaust," referring to the AIDS crisis among prostituted women, primarily caused by johns' and pimps' raping them and johns' refusal to use condoms.

These two articles articulated prostitution and trafficking as slavery and as sexual annihilation. Prostitution was understood as a dominating transformation of a woman into a special commodity in which the man who buys her shapes her into his own physical and psychological masturbatory entity.

I understand prostitution this way as well, after a decade of research that includes the accounts of more than 850 prostituted women, men, transgendered people, and children in 9 countries. HIV infection is not the only physical consequence of prostitution. No other "employment" other than war combat has comparable rates of physical assault, rape, and homicide. One woman explained, "What rape is to others, is normal to us." The symptoms of profound emotional distress that result from prostitution and trafficking are off the charts: depression, suicidality, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociation, substance abuse.

Today the sex industry is as global as any other industry. Sex trafficking is about marketing. It's globalized prostitution. The industry advertises young, AIDS-free organs for rent. Whether a woman has been trafficked or not, and whether prostitution is legal or not, researchers have found that the poorer she is, and the longer she's been in prostitution, the more likely she is to experience violence.

When a john buys a prostitute in the US, he usually can't tell if she's from across town, from across the country, or from another country. One Korean-American survivor of prostitution grew up in the US but was forced by pimps to fake poor English because johns liked that: the image of the exotic as well as the vulnerability of nowhere to run. Johns can't tell where she's from, they simply ask for "something different."

Prostitution, described by Friedman in 1993 as sexual slavery, has been redefined by the Left, including the Greens, as sex work. In that one word – work – the sexism and the physical and psychological violence of prostitution are made invisible. A battle is being waged by those who promote prostitution as a good-enough job for poor women against those of us who consider prostitution an institution that is so intrinsically unjust, discriminatory, and abusive that it can't be fixed, only abolished.

Survivors have described prostitution as "volunteer slavery" and as "the choice that is not a choice," while sex industry apologists on the Left insist that prostitution is "sex work," unpleasant labor but much like factory work. Do women consent to prostitution? Do they say to themselves, Hmn, what job should I choose: computer technician, lawyer, restaurant manager - no, I really want to be a prostitute? Women who "choose" prostitution were sexually abused as kids at much higher rates than other women. So they get defined as whores when they are little. That's one way women end up "choosing" prostitution: getting paid for the abuse they have grown up with and believing that's all they are good for. Other forces that "choose" *them* for prostitution include poor or no education and no job that pays a living wage. Prostitution exploits women's lack of survival options. Sex discrimination, poverty, racism, and abandonment are the forces that drive girls into prostitution. A Left analysis doesn't often address those structural issues in tandem where prostitution and trafficking are concerned. All they see is HIV.

According to sex-industry advocates: If you provide prostitutes with condoms and a union, their problems will be solved. Everyone should have unlimited access to condoms. That's a harm-reduction no-brainer. But women in 9 countries want more than condoms and unions. They want to get out of prostitution. In order to do that, they need housing, job training, jobs, and medical care, including substance-abuse treatment.

Violence against women is established as a primary risk factor for HIV. In 2005 Osotimehin recognized that for Nigerian adolescent girls, AIDS is fueled by sexual violence, by children being married off to adult men, and by the social unacceptability of using condoms. This social climate, harmful to all women, makes the vastly unequal prostitution transaction even more dangerous. Researchers at the Centers for Disease Control found in 1998 that most women enter prostitution as a result of rape, poverty, or abandonment. They urged public health programs to address human rights issues in conjunction with campaigns against HIV. Yet most have utterly failed to confront the poverty, racism, incest, rape, battering, sex discrimination in employment, and chronic sexual harassment that drive women into prostitution.

From 1982, when HIV was recognized as epidemic, HIV education programs focused on safer sex negotiation. They assumed that an assertive prostituted woman could persuade the john to use a condom. Health organizations can be lethally complicit with pimps and johns when they promote safer sex negotiation while failing to see that when she asks a john to use a condom *she can get killed.* A group of Nicaraguan women in prostitution urged that johns, not prostitutes, be compelled to use condoms. You don't often hear that recommendation from pimps and johns and HIV educators.

One mafia don who controlled prostitution in Mumbai told Friedman that AIDS was bad for business. Johns want clean meat. How have sex-industry capitalists turned that around and used the HIV epidemic to its advantage? By funneling millions of dollars into AIDS prevention programs that not only distribute condoms but also promote prostitution as a reasonable job for the world's poor women.

This is part 1 of a 2-part article. To be continued in *The Nation*, October 17, 2005

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This article was paid for by special donation to the **Coalition Against Trafficking in Women** (CATW) www.catwinternational.org, a nonprofit organization that has category II consultative status with the UN Economic & Social Council. CATW works internationally to combat prostitution and trafficking and has projects in over 25 countries. Donations can be made online through the CATW website, or by mail to CATW, PO Box 9338, N. Amherst, MA 01059.

Melissa Farley is at **Prostitution Research & Education**, a nonprofit organization. We are seeking ongoing funding for public education about prostitution/trafficking, for the website www.prostitutionresearch.com and for multi-country research on johns, ultimately aimed at preventing prostitution. Mail tax-deductible contributions to Prostitution Research & Education, Box 16254, San Francisco CA 94116-0254.

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Blackwater Down

JEREMY SCAHILL

The men from Blackwater USA arrived in New Orleans right after Katrina hit. The company known for its private security work guarding senior US diplomats in Iraq beat the federal government and most aid organizations to the scene in another devastated Gulf. About 150 heavily armed Blackwater troops dressed in full battle gear spread out into the chaos of New Orleans. Officially, the company boasted of its forces "join[ing] the hurricane relief effort." But its men on the ground told a different story.

Some patrolled the streets in SUVs with tinted windows and the Blackwater logo splashed on the back; others sped around the French Quarter in an unmarked car with no license plates. They congregated on the corner of St. James and Bourbon in front of a bar called 711, where Blackwater was establishing a makeshift headquarters. From the balcony above the bar, several Blackwater guys cleared out what had apparently been someone's apartment. They threw mattresses, clothes, shoes and other household items from the balcony to the street below. They draped an American flag from the balcony's railing. More than a dozen troops from the 82nd Airborne Division stood in formation on the street watching the action.

Armed men shuffled in and out of the building as a handful told stories of their past experiences in Iraq. "I worked the security detail of both Bremer and Negroponte," said one of the Blackwater guys, referring to the former head of the US occupation, L. Paul Bremer, and former US Ambassador to Iraq John Negroponte. Another complained, while talking on his cell phone, that he was getting only $350 a day plus his per diem. "When they told me New Orleans, I said, 'What country is that in?'" he said. He wore his company ID around his neck in a case with the phrase OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM printed on it.

In an hourlong conversation I had with four Blackwater men, they characterized their work in New Orleans as "securing neighborhoods" and "confronting criminals." They all carried automatic assault weapons and had guns strapped to their legs. Their flak jackets were covered with pouches for extra ammunition.

When asked what authority they were operating under, one guy said, "We're on contract with the Department of Homeland Security." Then, pointing to one of his comrades, he said, "He was even deputized by the governor of the state of Louisiana. We can make arrests and use lethal force if we deem it necessary." The man then held up the gold Louisiana law enforcement badge he wore around his neck. Blackwater spokesperson Anne Duke also said the company has a letter from Louisiana officials authorizing its forces to carry loaded weapons.

"This vigilantism demonstrates the utter breakdown of the government," says Michael Ratner, president of the Center for Constitutional Rights. "These private security forces have behaved brutally, with impunity, in Iraq. To have them now on the streets of New Orleans is frightening and possibly illegal."

Blackwater is not alone. As business leaders and government officials talk openly of changing the demographics of what was one of the most culturally vibrant of America's cities, mercenaries from companies like DynCorp, Intercon, American Security Group, Blackhawk, Wackenhut and an Israeli company called Instinctive Shooting International (ISI) are fanning out to guard private businesses and homes, as well as government projects and institutions. Within two weeks of the hurricane, the number of private security companies registered in Louisiana jumped from 185 to 235. Some, like Blackwater, are under federal contract. Others have been hired by the wealthy elite, like F. Patrick Quinn III, who brought in private security to guard his $3 million private estate and his luxury hotels, which are under consideration for a lucrative federal contract to house FEMA workers.

A possibly deadly incident involving Quinn's hired guns underscores the dangers of private forces policing American streets. On his second night in New Orleans, Quinn's security chief, Michael Montgomery, who said he worked for an Alabama company called Bodyguard and Tactical Security (BATS), was with a heavily armed security detail en route to pick up one of Quinn's associates and escort him through the chaotic city. Montgomery told me they came under fire from "black gangbangers" on an overpass near the poor Ninth Ward neighborhood. "At the time, I was on the phone with my business partner," he recalls. "I dropped the phone and returned fire."

Montgomery says he and his men were armed with AR-15s and Glocks and that they unleashed a barrage of bullets in the general direction of the alleged shooters on the overpass. "After that, all I heard was moaning and screaming, and the shooting stopped. That was it. Enough said."

Then, Montgomery says, "the Army showed up, yelling at us and thinking we were the enemy. We explained to them that we were security. I told them what had happened and they didn't even care. They just left." Five minutes later, Montgomery says, Louisiana state troopers arrived on the scene, inquired about the incident and then asked him for directions on "how they could get out of the city." Montgomery says that no one ever asked him for any details of the incident and no report was ever made. "One thing about security," Montgomery says, "is that we all coordinate with each other—one family." That co-ordination doesn't include the offices of the Secretaries of State in Louisiana and Alabama, which have no record of a BATS company.

A few miles away from the French Quarter, another wealthy New Orleans businessman, James Reiss, who serves in Mayor Ray Nagin's administration as chairman of the city's Regional Transit Authority, brought in some heavy guns to guard the elite gated community of Audubon Place: Israeli mercenaries dressed in black and armed with M-16s. Two Israelis patrolling the gates outside Audubon told me they had served as professional soldiers in the Israeli military, and one boasted of having participated in

Jeremy Scahill is a correspondent for Democracy Now! *Research support was provided by the Investigative Fund of The Nation Institute.*

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the invasion of Lebanon. "We have been fighting the Palestinians all day, every day, our whole lives," one of them tells me. "Here in New Orleans, we are not guarding from terrorists." Then, tapping on his machine gun, he says, "Most Americans, when they see these things, that's enough to scare them."

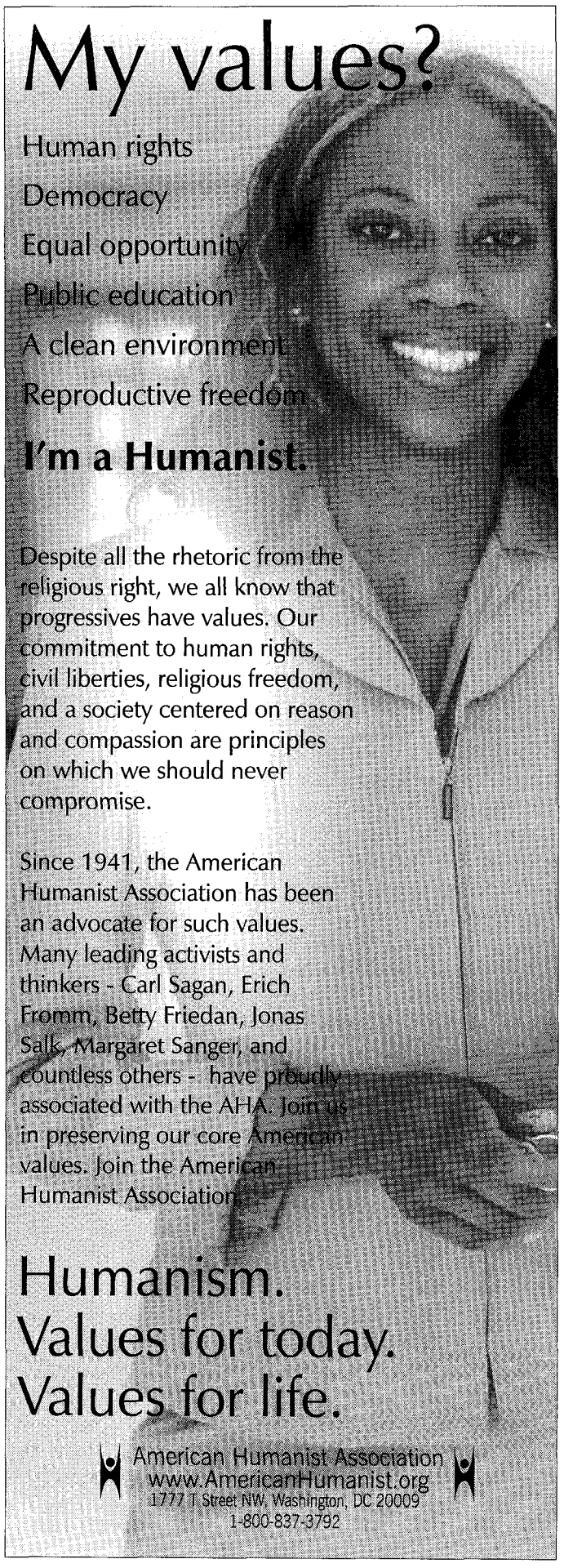
The men work for ISI, which describes its employees as "veterans of the Israeli special task forces from the following Israeli government bodies: Israel Defense Force (IDF), Israel National Police Counter Terrorism units, Instructors of Israel National Police Counter Terrorism units, General Security Service (GSS or 'Shin Beit'), Other restricted intelligence agencies." The company was formed in 1993. Its website profile says: "Our up-to-date services meet the challenging needs for Homeland Security preparedness and overseas combat procedures and readiness. ISI is currently an approved vendor by the US Government to supply Homeland Security services."

Unlike ISI or BATS, Blackwater is operating under a federal contract to provide 164 armed guards for FEMA reconstruction projects in Louisiana. That contract was announced just days after Homeland Security Department spokesperson Russ Knocke told the *Washington Post* he knew of no federal plans to hire Blackwater or other private security firms. "We believe we've got the right mix of personnel in law enforcement for the federal government to meet the demands of public safety," he said. Before the contract was announced, the Blackwater men told me, they were already on contract with DHS and that they were sleeping in camps organized by the federal agency.

One might ask, given the enormous presence in New Orleans of National Guard, US Army, US Border Patrol, local police from around the country and practically every other government agency with badges, why private security companies are needed, particularly to guard federal projects. "It strikes me...that that may not be the best use of money," said Illinois Senator Barack Obama.

Blackwater's success in procuring federal contracts could well be explained by major-league contributions and family connections to the GOP. According to election records, Blackwater's CEO and co-founder, billionaire Erik Prince, has given tens of thousands to Republicans, including more than $80,000 to the Republican National Committee the month before Bush's victory in 2000. This past June, he gave $2,100 to Senator Rick Santorum's re-election campaign. He has also given to House majority leader Tom DeLay and a slew of other Republican candidates, including Bush/Cheney in 2004. As a young man, Prince interned with President George H.W. Bush, though he complained at the time that he "saw a lot of things I didn't agree with—homosexual groups being invited in, the budget agreement, the Clean Air Act, those kind of bills. I think the Administration has been indifferent to a lot of conservative concerns."

Prince, a staunch right-wing Christian, comes from a powerful Michigan Republican family, and his father, Edgar, was a close friend of former Republican presidential candidate and antichoice leader Gary Bauer. In 1988 the elder Prince helped Bauer start the Family Research Council. Erik Prince's sister, Betsy, once chaired the Michigan Republican Party and is married to Dick DeVos, whose father, billionaire Richard DeVos, is co-founder of the major Republican benefactor Amway. Dick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Democracy
Equal opportunity
Public education
A clean environment
Reproductive freedom
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Despite all the rhetoric from the religious right, we all know that progressives have values. Our commitment to human rights, civil liberties, religious freedom, and a society centered on reason and compassion are principles on which we should never compromise.
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DeVos is also a big-time contributor to the Republican Party and will likely be the GOP candidate for Michigan governor in 2006. Another Blackwater founder, president Gary Jackson, is also a major contributor to Republican campaigns.

After the killing of four Blackwater mercenaries in Falluja in March 2004, Erik Prince hired the Alexander Strategy Group, a PR firm with close ties to GOPers like DeLay. By mid-November the company was reporting 600 percent growth. In February 2005 the company hired Ambassador Cofer Black, former coordinator for counterterrorism at the State Department and former director of the CIA's Counterterrorism Center, as vice chairman. Just as the hurricane was hitting, Blackwater's parent company, the Prince Group, named Joseph Schmitz, who had just resigned as the Pentagon's Inspector General, as the group's chief operating officer and general counsel.

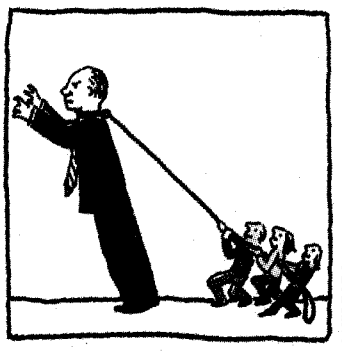
While juicing up the firm's political connections, Prince has been advocating greater use of private security in international operations, arguing at a symposium at the National Defense Industrial Association earlier this year that firms like his are more efficient than the military. In May Blackwater's Jackson testified before Congress in an effort to gain lucrative Homeland Security contracts to train 2,000 new Border Patrol agents, saying Blackwater understands "the value to the government of one-stop shopping." With President Bush using the Katrina disaster to try to repeal Posse Comitatus (the ban on using US troops in domestic law enforcement) and Blackwater and other security firms clearly initiating a push to install their paramilitaries on US soil, the war is coming home in yet another ominous way. As one Blackwater mercenary said, "This is a trend. You're going to see a lot more guys like us in these situations." ■

SEVEN STEPS TO RECLAIM THE PRINCIPLE THAT COMPANIES SHOULD SERVE THE PUBLIC GOOD.

How to Curb Corporate Power

RALPH NADER

Scarcely a week goes by without another surge in the ongoing corporate crime wave—a large drug company misleads doctors about heart attack risks in order to sell more pills, an insurance company manipulates its earnings by billions through complicated offshore reinsurance dealings, major banks are under investigation for illegally charging minority borrowers higher loan rates or helping a dictator stash his ill-gotten gains.



CAITLIN DOVER

These particular stories, unlike many other business crimes and frauds, made the news and sometimes even drew Congressional hearings. But Congress has produced no corrective legislation since the narrow-gauged Sarbanes-Oxley law of 2002, inspired by the Enron scandal. Rather, the major accomplishments of the legislative season so far have been laws from the wish list of the behemoth corporations, who annually shell out tens of millions of dollars for lobbying—a bankruptcy "reform" bill for a credit card industry that reported $30 billion in profits last year, a class-action-lawsuit "reform" bill for the insurance companies and the Chamber of Commerce (now the biggest lobbyist in Washington) and an "energy" bill with generous taxpayer subsidies for oil and gas companies like ExxonMobil, which in 2004 already reported the world's biggest-ever annual profit for a single company: $25.3 billion.

What can be done? Lots. Those looking for ideas would do well to pick up *The People's Business: Controlling Corporations and Restoring Democracy*, a new book sponsored by Citizen Works, which I founded, whose authors, Lee Drutman and Charlie Cray, propose that we frame a vigorous movement around a number of immediate and long-term shifts of power away from giant corporations to strengthen a citizen-sovereign democracy.

But nothing begins to happen unless the few progressives in Congress get over their resistance to introducing corporate reform legislation, while pressing for a national and Congressional debate on this all-important subject. Back in the 1960s a few archconservative corporatists would put bills into the hopper that would cause raucous laughter among the dominant liberals. No one is laughing anymore; the corporations' wish list is now Congress's to-do list.

The lesson is that even bills that do not make it to a public hearing can still form a nucleus of ideas for educating and organizing the assertive citizenry around the country. Such bills commit their sponsoring legislators to speak for and defend the reallocation of power from the corporate state to patients, laborers, consumers, communities and voters. Such bills form the start of an offense against the corporate supremacists and their allies in the House and Senate. I've made these arguments for years with Congressional progressives, providing fully drafted legislation requiring no, or little, allocation from public budgets because it shifts power and facilitates civic organization. Yet none of the fifty-five members of the Progressive Caucus to date would introduce even one of these empowerment bills, though they had little disagreement with them on the merits. Consigned to playing defense (and not too robustly at that) for two decades, discouraged, deflated progressives have become accustomed to defensive thinking, which, of course, corrosively feeds on itself.

It would not be difficult to get the ball rolling with the following modest legislative proposals. Given media attention, such prudent positions might even attract some unlikely Republican

Ralph Nader is a consumer advocate and author of the recent books The Good Fight *and* Civic Arousal *(HarperCollins).*

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co-sponsors, along with liberal Democratic supporters.

1. Crack Down on Corporate Crime. Most of the leading federal agencies responsible for pursuing corporate criminals—including the Justice Department, the Internal Revenue Service and even the Securities and Exchange Commission—remain woefully understaffed, underfunded and undermotivated. The Justice Department should be directed to create a permanent, well-funded corporate crime division with specialized technical personnel (including accountants, engineers and lab technicians) and the additional resources necessary not only to handle major ongoing fraud, corruption and safety violations (the FBI reports it is investigating at least eighteen cases of corporate fraud involving at least $1 billion each) but also to develop the kind of tools prosecutors can use to crack down on corporate crime.

An annual corporate crime report similar to the one the FBI produces on street crime would help law-enforcement officials identify emerging patterns and direct resources more effectively. If we are truly serious about cracking down on the ongoing epidemic of corporate crime, at a minimum the government must collect and disseminate comprehensive information about the nature and extent of the damage.

Another ongoing question is how to effectively penalize corporate lawbreakers. Creative sanctions like equity fines, probationary treatment, behavioral sanctions, dechartering and other structural reforms that address the incentives behind a criminogenic corporate culture are routinely ignored in favor of denials of culpability garnished by slap-on-the-wrist fines. All too often these fines are passed on to consumers and taxpayers. Federal acquisition regulations should be tightened so those lawbreaking corporations do not receive any fraction of the $265 billion worth of government contracts given out each year. Aggressively applied, the debarment sanction can offer a good carrot-and-stick approach to companies that not only break the law but also restructure their operations in order to claim nominal residence in Bermuda and other tax havens.

2. Rein in the Imperial CEOs. Warren Buffett once suggested that willingness to curb excessive CEO pay is "the acid test of corporate reform." Yet the ratio of average large company CEO pay (now $11.8 million) to average worker pay ($27,460) spiked from 301 to 1 in 2003 to 431 to 1 in 2004. While Wal-Mart paid CEO Lee Scott 871 times what it paid the average "associate," the ratio between executive and worker pay in Europe hovers closer to 25 to 1. In 1982 the ratio at US corporations was about 42 to 1; by 2000 it had spiraled to about 525 to 1.

Not only does executive greed spawn corruption and down-the-line resentment; it also creates significant conflicts of interest, such as providing an incentive for CEOs to offload debt and inflate profits so their stock options are more enriching.

Unfortunately, shareholders' increasing attempts to rein in outrageous CEO pay packages by reforming the board nomination process and creating tighter links between pay and performance have been met with fierce resistance by dominant company executives, the Chamber of Commerce and the Business Roundtable. It's time for the SEC to give corporate shareholders—the true owners of the corporations—the right to curb out-of-control executive pay packages, which often expand while the companies' earnings and performance decline. Representative Martin Sabo in July introduced the Income Equity Act, which would eliminate tax deductions for executive compensation exceeding twenty-five times that of the company's lowest-paid full-time employee.

3. Shore Up the Civil Justice System. One of the lost lessons of Enron and other corporate crime cases is how Washington's deregulation created an incentive for the market system's professional "gatekeepers"—the accountants, bankers and lawyers—to avoid their responsibilities and, in some cases, even aid and abet the fraud. Shortly after Enron's collapse Columbia law professor John Coffee advised a Senate committee that so-called securities reform laws like the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act (PSLRA) of 1995, which made it harder for shareholder victims of corporate financial fraud to sue, along with related laws and court decisions, were probably the single greatest structural and psychological cause of the company's downfall. The reason is that these laws weakened the potential deterrent of civil lawsuits, emboldening the executives, accountants and lawyers behind Enron and other scandals to cook the books.

This experience with the PSLRA should be a sobering harbinger of what will likely result from the current bipartisan tort "reform" binge. Although the twisted positions advanced by proponents of tort "reform" have been handily rebutted by Public Citizen (citizen.org) and the Center for Justice and Democracy (centerjd.org), which have produced mountains of facts and brought forth the victims of bad physician or hospital practices to speak for the freedom to hold their harm-doers accountable, the civic and political organization is not there yet.

4. Regulate in the Public Interest. The ferocious corporate assault over the past twenty-five years on regulations that worked has cost lives, health and trillions of dollars. Most of the companies involved in recent giant accounting scams fall within the industrial sectors that were radically deregulated just years before—energy, banking, brokerage and telecommunications. In these industries, deregulation, or taking the government cop off the corporate beat, created a kind of gold-rush mentality. This put pressure on companies to cook up new deals and phony accounting to lure investors. Bills to re-regulate with more resources for corporate law enforcement and to revive the proposed small consumer advocacy agency, which almost passed in the 1970s, were blocked by lobbies.

5. Trust-Busting in the New Century: Start With the Media. It's time to think seriously about a new antitrust policy that recognizes new ways of domestic and international collusion, price-fixing and product fixing. When transnational power rests with a handful of large corporations, democracy necessarily suffers. As Louis Brandeis once famously put it, "We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both."

The key to corporate reform is a vibrant press. When the media fail to provide coverage of civic engagement, change is difficult. Because today's media are essentially dominated by six multinational conglomerates, much of the news looks and sounds the same, regardless of what channel we may be watching or what newspaper we may be reading, and regardless of our own political views. One way to insure the broader spectrum of opinion necessary for a vibrant democracy is to enact competition rules—limits on cross-media ownership, especially in localities, and on vertical integration, for example—that essentially mandate diversity by prohibiting media conglomerates and restoring the fair-

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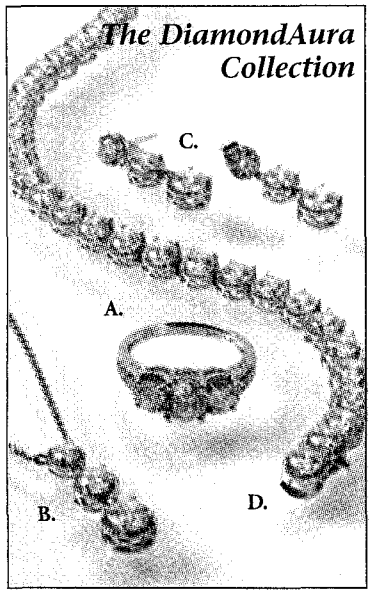

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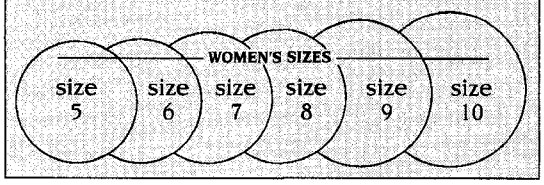

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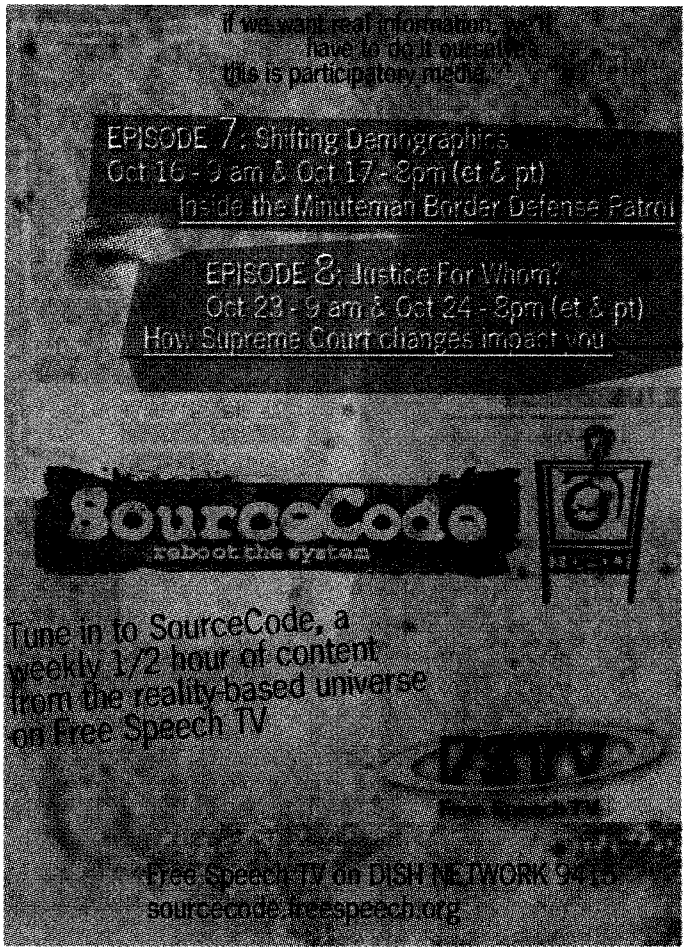
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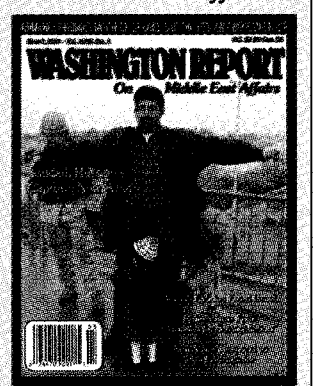

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ness doctrine on the public's airwaves. Remember the remarkable collaboration in 2003 of left and right (e.g., Common Cause and the NRA) against the FCC's media concentration rules.

In addition to advancing the nonprofit, noncommercial media outlets, including low-power radio, today's media activists are battling the corporate takeover of new media technologies like community wireless networks, key community assets that deserve to be protected from predatory corporations. Democratic leadership has not thrown its support behind Representative Maurice Hinchley's Media Ownership Reform Act, which would reduce media concentration and restore more fairness to broadcasting.

6. Get Corporations Out of Our Elections. The cost of running for a seat in the House of Representatives is more than $1 million. The cost of winning a seat in the Senate is well over $5 million—running nearly as high as $40 million in the largest states. The Bush/Cheney 2004 re-election campaign spent $367 million. As a result, those who run for office package their candidacies in a manner attractive to those with money. Roughly 75 percent of the money raised in campaigns comes from business or business-related interests. Corporations are legal entities, not human beings; as such they should be prohibited from contributing to campaigns, sponsoring PACs or lobbying.

7. Reclaim the Constitution. The court-made doctrine of "corporate personhood," created by pro-corporate judicial activists in the late nineteenth century, continues to expand as the result of a well-orchestrated "business civil liberties" movement led by dozens of corporate-front legal groups and right-wing think tanks. The consequences are far-reaching and often insidious. Corporations' growing use of referendums to advance their economic interests and the intrusion of commercial advertising into the public sphere are often legitimized by questionable claims to First Amendment speech rights. Corporations also increasingly use constitutional challenges to undermine local decision-making authority and federal regulations and to impede the right of association by workers, consumers and small investors.

The relentless colonization of the Constitution by corporations and their proxies has overwhelmed citizens' ability to express their collective interest and exercise their sovereign authority over big business. Comprehensive corporate reform should be a central concern of progressive legislators. But they must drop the bills in the hopper to get the discussion under way. Avoidance of corporate power issues reaches deeply into both parties. This was reflected in the non-questioning of former corporate attorney John Roberts during his Senate confirmation hearings.

Conclusion: Subordinating Corporations to People. Ultimately, the most effective way to control corporations is to restore citizen democracy and find effective ways to reclaim the once widely accepted principle that corporations are but creatures of the state, chartered by the state under the premise that they will serve the public good, and entitled only to those revocable rights and privileges granted by citizen governments. That is, corporations are our servants, not our masters. By doing so we will be able to create a more just and sustainable economy, an economy driven by the values of humanity and community and democracy instead of the current globally omnicidal economy driven by the relentless pursuit of short-range financial profit at any cost—market and military—to innocent peoples of the world. ■

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LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued from Page 2)
extreme? Fuck them all, left, right and center. I was there. It's accurate. And I was one of the lucky ones—incredible friends who took care of me during the endless night before and the bloody aftermath. So I'm here to tell you: Men have to go to war to find the kind of courage it takes for a woman to go down this path. Millions of us found it before *Roe v. Wade* and I really wouldn't mess with us! No shame. No regrets. JUDITH CATTERALL

POLLITT REPLIES

New York City

■ Vasu Murti claims that Feminists for Life does not want to criminalize all abortions, it just supports "legal protection for women and children"—from abortion! What sort of doublespeak is this? The position of FFL is precisely that of the Catholic Church, which permits the termination of a life-threatening pregnancy if, and only if, the fetus has no hope of survival. Ectopic pregnancy, in which the fertilized egg is implanted outside the womb, is the usual example. If, however, a woman is pregnant and at risk of dying from a heart condition, or from having to postpone chemotherapy, she's out of luck. Medically necessary abortions may be rare, but to say "late-term abortions are never medically necessary" is just propaganda, on a par with Congressional diagnoses that found Terri Schiavo to be in remarkably good health.

Murti is similarly evasive about FFL's scaremongering over breast cancer. If FFL thinks women "can handle the truth about their bodies," why not give it to them? Instead, the FFL website uses old research that makes abortion seem a risk for breast cancer and ignores the more recent research that debunks the connection. That's just not honest, and given that Serrin Foster, head of FFL, told me the breast cancer claims might be taken down since FFL are "not doctors," I'm surprised the bogus material is still posted, and that Murti defends it.

Mary Krane Derr says I am wrong to say a feminist cannot oppose abortion. Actually what I said was that a feminist could not force another woman to bear a child. A feminist can certainly oppose abortion for herself, and probably many do. The question is whether a feminist can favor substituting her will and beliefs and judgment in this most personal matter for that of the woman who is actually having the experience and must bear its consequences. Can a feminist say, "You must have that baby no matter what you want, and I'm devoting myself to making sure that if you do abort it will be as dangerous and humiliating as possible" to a 12-year-old? A rape victim? A woman in poor health? A woman who already has all the kids she can manage? A woman who feels with every fiber of her being that she is not able or ready to be a mother? That doesn't sound like sisterhood to me. KATHA POLLITT

LET THEM EAT JET SKIS

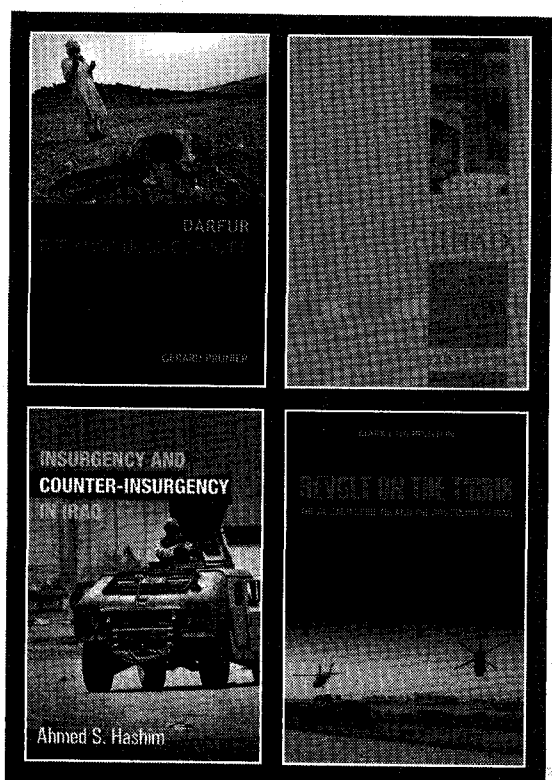
Port Jefferson, NY

■ Congratulations to Steve Brodner for his brutally incisive "Surf's up, Dude!" ["Comix Nation," Sept. 26] and bravo! to *The Nation* (yet again) for having the courage to publish it. It says everything. ROHAN PERERA

CORRECTIONS

■ In "Sex & the Single Reporter," last week's "Exchange" column, Debbie Nathan accidentally cited the blog Radosh.net as that of Ronald, instead of Daniel, Radosh.

In the same issue, in Roberto Lovato's "The War for Latinos," an editorial error placed the launch of a campaign to educate Latinos about military recruitment in schools in August 2004 instead of this past August 24.



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COMMENT
CONTINUED

Sturm und Drang

The supposedly consensual and orderly Germans are fighting one another as hard after the election as before it. In a numerical stalemate, each of the two major parties claims the chancellorship and the right to lead a new coalition. And the nearly 78 percent of the citizenry who voted disregarded journalists, pollsters, professors and the elites, above all from business, who instructed them to abandon the welfare state and return to subordination to the United States. Fifty-two percent of the electorate voted for the opposite.

The German left is represented by three parties. The Social Democrats, led by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder in a brilliant comeback from an uninterrupted series of losses in state elections, got 34 percent of the vote—down four points from 2002, but they began the campaign at 26 percent in the polls. The Greens maintained their 8 percent while the new Left Party, made up of Social Democratic dissidents in the west and former Communists in the east, won nearly 9 percent. Together they would have a majority of 327 seats (out of 613).

On the right, the Christian Democratic Union and its ally, the Christian Social Union, went down 3.5 points, to 35 percent. Their leader, the eastern German Angela Merkel, had good reason to look crushed in her TV appearances on election night, since she began the campaign at nearly 50 percent in the polls. The Free Democrats, a market party of the affluent, got nearly 10 percent, improving its score considerably. Neither the Social Democrats and their Green coalition partner, nor the Christian Democrats and the Free Democrats, come close to a majority.

The terms "left" and "right" are too simple. The Social Democrats amputated the welfare state to try to save it—but could not stop unemployment from rising to more than 11 percent, with corresponding anxiety among the employed. The Greens concentrated on environmental programs and on civil rights and integrating immigrants. The coalition's foreign policy, along with that of France, rejected George W. Bush's unilateralism and refused to join the United States in its war against Iraq.

The Left Party's western leader is Oskar Lafontaine, who was the Social Democrats' chairman and finance minister but who quit after only a few months in office in disgust over Schröder's importation to Germany of Tony Blair's market-oriented "Third Way" (the eastern component of the Left Party consists of very gray ex-Communists led by the colorful Gregor Gysi). The Social Democrats cannot forgive Lafontaine's desertion—even though many of them agree with his policies. They resent the Left Party as schismatics and will not take them back into the church. And the Left Party despises the Social Democrats' alleged apostasy. In secular Germany, religious passion is entirely political.

The right is not, by US standards, so right. The Christian parties, influenced by theological ideas of social justice, were more committed to the welfare state than many of our own Democrats. Even so, Merkel, who confuses the Western welfare state with the neo-Stalinism under which she grew up, echoed the social Darwinism of Germany's most ardent capitalists. She shoved a flat-taxer, contemptuous of the welfare state, to the front of her campaign, and he became a huge target of opportunity for the Social Democrats, the Greens and the Left Party. He retreated to academic obscurity, but not before wrecking his sponsor's chances. On foreign policy the Christian Democrats are the traditional party of subordination to the United States, but they are also the party of European integration—incompatible projects. Merkel was careful not to visit Bush before the election, but it is clear that she would fly over for orders after taking office. That was another factor in the party's losses: Dislike of American empire is a matter of German consensus.

What now? One obvious coalition would consist of Social Democrats, Greens and Free Democrats. The last, after all, were partners of earlier Social Democratic leaders Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt. The Free Democrats have declared that they will not even talk to the Social Democrats—but perhaps that will change. Another combination would be Christian Democrats, Free Democrats and Greens. This coalition is possible—but it would make us wonder when Bush will invite Ralph Nader to Crawford. Moreover, the Greens would not accept US domination in the transatlantic relationship.

That leaves the so-called "grand coalition" of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats. There would be nothing grand about it, and it would break up after a year or so. However, Schröder insists that the Social Democrats will join a government only under his chancellorship, and the party is behind him. Merkel's party position is far weaker; in fact, she could be ousted from her post if she's not able to form a government. In the campaign the Social Democrats and Schröder rediscovered their souls as proponents of the welfare state. The Christian Democrats lost theirs by capitulation to the ideology of the market.

According to the Constitution, within a month of the election the President must propose a chancellor candidate to be voted up or down by Parliament. If there is no majority approval, Parliament itself can nominate a candidate, who must also receive a majority. Thereafter, a plurality suffices. The President, Horst Köhler, could disregard a plurality (but not a majority) and order new elections. Köhler is officially neutral, but this former managing director of the International Monetary Fund is an ally of the market wing of the Christian Democrats. How neutral he will be is a question. Merkel or another candidate from her party could win election with a plurality over Schröder or another Social Democrat—if the Left Party abstains. That's the intention of its leaders, but the vote is secret, and parliamentarians could follow their own counsel. A number of coalitions and outcomes are possible. Merkel or Schröder or both could be replaced by their parties, and new elections could follow a total stalemate. Meanwhile, German business leaders are demanding a government responsive to themselves. To make the point, the giant conglomerate Siemens has now fired several thousand workers. Germany is in for a very turbulent month. Perhaps the citizens, having once defied their elites, will find a way to do so again. NORMAN BIRNBAUM

Norman Birnbaum, University Professor Emeritus at Georgetown University Law Center, is the author of After Progress: American Social Reform and European Socialism in the Twentieth Century *(Oxford).*

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

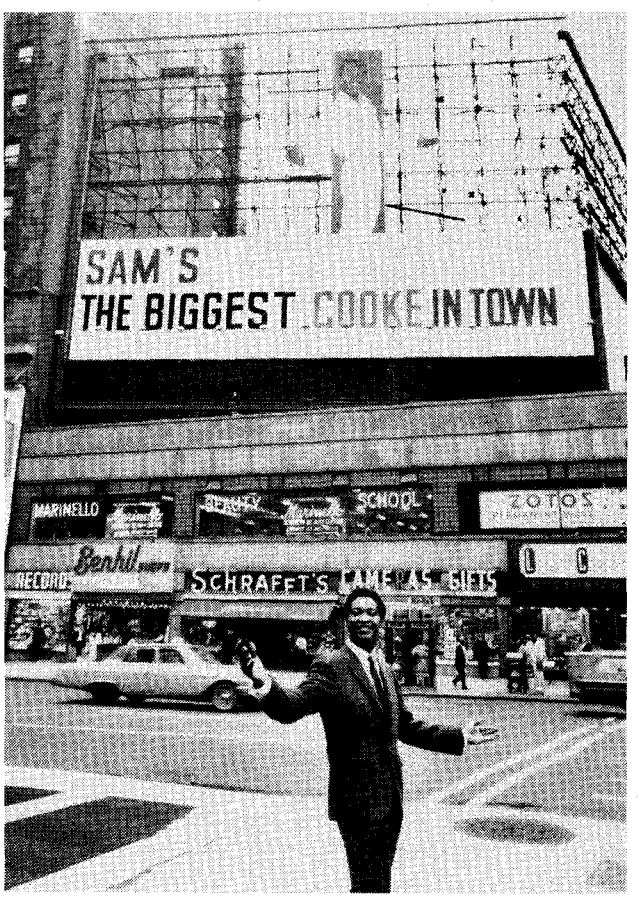
In Search of Sam Cooke

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DREAM BOOGIE: The Triumph of Sam Cooke.
By Peter Guralnick.
Little, Brown. 752 pp. $27.95.

Peter Guralnick's *Dream Boogie* follows *You Send Me*, Daniel Wolff's serious and authoritative Sam Cooke biography, by ten years. It's nearly twice as long—too long, like so many doorstops before it, including *Careless Love*, the second volume of Guralnick's life of Elvis. But it draws on research that would have justified an even more monumental book. Guralnick doesn't add much to Wolff's thesis. Both argue that though the soul singer who predated soul music made many records that fell short of his artistic potential, he was nevertheless a heroic figure, topping a voice that for those who loved it was liquid magic—cool, relaxed, infinitely inviting—with a questing intelligence and cultural ambition startling in a teen idol whose most important compositions included "You Send Me" and "Twistin' the Night Away." As Cooke strove for pop success, he funded one of the most resolutely black labels the record business has known. He supported the civil rights movement in word and deed. He studied black history. At the time of his death in December 1964, he really was a hero, cut down in his prime at 33, and Guralnick's sense of this man, and of the lesser men and women who surrounded him, is vastly more complex and vivid than his predecessor's.

That Wolff is no hack hardly puts him in a league with Guralnick, who alongside the more eccentric and intellectually ambitious Greil Marcus is the prestige brand in rock authordom. By 1986 Guralnick had published two major profile collections and *Sweet Soul Music*, which remains the go-to history of the style. Yet only with the 1994 publication of Elvis I, *Last Train to Memphis*, did many outside the specialist audience recognize his gift. Even in the intermittently clumsy 1971 *Feel Like Going Home*, where five of the eight subjects are bluesmen, Guralnick's self-effacing eye lent a *cinéma vérité* authority lacking in, for instance, Michael Lydon's hipper and slicker collection *Rock Folk*. By 1979's *Lost Highway*, which focuses on country and rockabilly, he was a master of the journalistic portrait. Yet for Guralnick, who until the 1990s made his living running a summer camp he'd inherited, journalism was only a means to literature. Despite a few shortcomings, *Last Train to Memphis* justified his ambitions—it is a book that grows in the mind. I can't see how any reader could come away unmoved by Elvis Presley's intelligence, musicality and sense of spiritual adventure, or still crediting the character assassinations of Albert Goldman's *Elvis*, which Marcus once predicted would be conventional wisdom in perpetuity.



COURTESY OF ABKCO RECORDS

Sam Cooke in Times Square, 1964

Formally, *Last Train to Memphis* represented a major change. In the profiles, Guralnick aimed for the intensive reporting of New Journalism, but he also exploited

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the freewheeling first person of sixties rock criticism. While he was most often the nerd in the corner, jotting down details as his subjects lived their lives and, occasionally, answered his questions, at moments—in introductions, conclusions, afterwords, interjections and sometimes whole essays—he became the A student dazzled by meeting one of his highly unsuburban heroes, or explaining what makes that hero tick, or figuring out how rock and roll changed his life. From the first he had confidence in opinions he adjusted as he learned more. Over the years, however, he grew more discreet about revealing them as such—where in *Sweet Soul Music* the narrative he was compelled to impose on a welter of secondhand evidence also proved a story of personal discovery, in *Last Train to Memphis* Guralnick disappeared entirely, avoiding the "I" and limiting psychological interpretation and critical judgment.

The book tells Presley's story you-are-there fashion, with he-said-she-said at a minimum, and dazzles anyway because Guralnick's interviewing persona—where he presumably maintains his admirer-not-expert pose—induces people to tell him the damnedest things. Arcing up toward infinity before crashing to the death of Gladys Presley and Elvis's induction into the Army, *Last Train to Memphis* is an unflinchingly affectionate argument for democratic genius. But Guralnick found it harder to extract tragedy from Presley's decline into drugged isolation, and though *Careless Love* was praised profusely, even gratefully—rock and roll's challenge to the reading classes exposed as a sham—its accreted detail becomes as boring as the second half of the King's life. Because Cooke's life didn't divide down the middle, *Dream Boogie* fuses the moods of the two Presley volumes. But in the end it's diminished—not drastically but markedly—by Guralnick's reluctance to say what he thinks, an MO in which formal principle and professional convenience are difficult to distinguish.

Sam Cooke already envisioned a musical career as the 6-year-old lead tenor in the Singing Children, the family gospel group organized by his hard-hustling preacher/factory worker father, and as a young teenager he was both bookish and charismatic, one of those people who convinces anyone he talks to that he's there only for him—or her. Clean-cut and ingratiating, he was consciously set on stardom even then, and not just black stardom. The gospel equivalent of a matinee idol by age 22, he spent four years figuring out how to breach the pop market, which he conquered when the simple vocal showcase "You Send Me"—the B side of his first secular 45, a version of "Summertime" released under a pseudonym that fooled no one in the gospel world—turned him into an instant idol, adored by girls black and white. With young male fans he was never quite such a hit, but despite an ill-timed flop at the Copa in 1958, white adults took to him, and though he had his ups and downs, he was a consistent commercial presence: not the first gospel-trained singer to go pop, but until Aretha Franklin the biggest.

Though Cooke's voice was instantly recognizable, the singer himself was a mystery who held even his intimate friends at a distance.

But Cooke's opaque and compulsive sides also surfaced early. Exhibit A is the womanizing that would end with the race hero shot dead in his underwear by an ex-madam in a cheap southwest LA motel. He did jail time for "obscene literature" as a teenager, and even when he was the 17-year-old leader of the fledgling Highway QCs, his sexual appetites stood out on a gospel circuit that never equated holiness with chastity. By the time he'd joined the much bigger Soul Stirrers, Cooke was a well-known dog. Multiple witnesses recall his taste for orgies and much greater danger—once, in Texas, he had sex in the shower with the wife of a white radio man, who was passed out on Cooke's motel bed. He drank, too. He saw a continuing street connection—playing craps with the boys, greeting winos in the alley—as integral to his black pride. And like many driven charismatics, he held even intimate friends at a distance, in his case with "an inscrutably cheerful and impenetrable calm which, for all they knew, might merely have masked the simple fact that it was all as much a mystery to him as it was to them." That unknowability took other forms, including sudden rages all the more troubling for their infrequency. And then there was the way this affable, generous, idealistic guy screwed one manager, agent and label head after another.

Most of the peripheral characterizations that bring *Dream Boogie* alive are of African-Americans. There's Cooke's wife, Barbara, who avoided Guralnick for years before opening up. There's his singing brother L.C., his player brother Charles and his relentlessly striving father. There are satellites and running buddies like replacement Soul Stirrer Leroy Crume and Cooke's protégé Bobby Womack, who married Barbara two and a half months after Cooke died. The colleagues include civil rights pioneers like staunch NAACP supporter Clyde McPhatter and bandleader Harold Battiste, whose visionary musicians' collective became the house band at Cooke's SAR label, but most are on the wild side: gangster-friendly singer Lloyd Price and pugnacious Cooke imitator Johnnie Taylor; lost proto-soul balladeer Little Willie John, who would die in prison, and night-crawling Johnnie Morisette, who preferred pimping to singing. And there are disc jockeys, promoters and pros, like fast-talking Bumps Blackwell and Cooke's longtime advisers S.R. Crain and J.W. Alexander. But beyond Barbara Cooke and Bobby Womack, Guralnick's chief supporting players are white businessmen.

From the start this Jewish kid from New England proved deft at drawing out unlettered Southerners. But researching *Sweet Soul Music*, he came to realize that another class of middle-class white people shared this knack: the marginal entrepreneurs and music lovers who ran the companies that recorded such artists. That book celebrated not just Stax's Jim Stewart and Estelle Axton and Otis Redding manager turned Capricorn Records founder Phil Walden, but, through them, the de facto integration of the soul industry as Guralnick defined it—which excluded the poppier Motown and Philadelphia substyles, both masterminded by black bizzers. And some of *Dream Boogie*'s most memorable descriptions are of white businessmen: in addition to many lesser figures, Specialty Records' Art Rupe, the liberal gospel enthusiast who chiseled his artists a bit less than was customary and was so affronted when they chiseled back that he quit the business; Hugo Peretti and Luigi Creatore of RCA, whose unbridled crassness in no way interfered with their candor, intelligence or sense of fun; and Allen Klein, the accountant turned manager who wrested Cooke's catalogue away from RCA and ended up controlling it himself—as he does, for instance, the Rolling Stones' sixties music.

This is a mark of quality, and an impressive leap for Guralnick, initially a folkie romantic for whom Elvis "never recaptured the spirit or the verve of those first Sun sessions." To reread Wolff's received takes on the above-named is to understand why not being a hack is never enough—there's no sense of these human beings' humanity. Still, Guralnick's taste in bizzers has to make you wonder. At stake isn't just the conundrum of why white executives dig

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gritty putative authenticity more than black ones, and whether this predilection doesn't arouse untoward sympathy in folkie romantics (not to mention observers who've mocked folkie romanticism for decades, like me). In this book, there's also the Allen Klein problem.

Klein is one of the most widely mistrusted figures in the history of the music business. In late 1963, with Cooke an established star who craved total autonomy, Klein formed a dummy corporation to receive Cooke's payments from RCA, named it after Cooke's daughter Tracey, installed Cooke as president and reserved 100 percent of its ownership for himself—an arrangement that, after Cooke's death, had a dire effect on the extended family Cooke had always propped up. By 1968, according to Rolling Stones chronicler Philip Norman, there were fifty lawsuits against Klein, who by then had his mitts on half the British Invasion, and much later he did two months for income-tax evasion. But although Guralnick details the Tracey setup, he pays less mind to its consequences than to Klein's financial genius in devising it. He stresses that when Cooke died intestate he was emotionally estranged from his wife. He pooh-poohs rumors that Cooke hoped to dump Klein as he had first manager Louis Tate and crossover-guru manager Bumps Blackwell, Specialty's Art Rupe and Keen's John Siamas, sixties manager Jess Rand and sixties booking agent Jerry Brandt. And by establishing Cooke's taste for reckless sex and, occasionally, prostitutes, he forestalls speculation about the singer's death, which some fantasists have even tried to pin on Klein.

As Guralnick says, it's "impossible to know exactly what happened" at that motel, although I wish he'd gone somewhere with the possibility he leaves open that prostitute Elisa Boyer and manager Bertha Franklin were in cahoots. Like him, however, I buy the semi-official version, in which Cooke had his money and clothes stolen by Boyer and was then shot by Franklin when he went looking for the thief (perhaps in one of those rare rages, Guralnick implies). But though *Dream Boogie* offers more interpretation than the Presley books, Guralnick continues to disdain speculation and unanswerable questions. Thus he never points out what is obvious—that whatever his feelings about Barbara, Cooke would certainly have preferred to leave his assets to some version of his family than to Klein. Nor does *Dream Boogie* engage the animadversions Wolff and others—especially Arthur Kempton, whose 2003 *Boogaloo* isn't even in the bibliography—level at Klein, who in Guralnick's portrait is a prince of a fellow, if a bit of a rogue, who was deeply touched by Sam Cooke. Since Guralnick makes clear that the book couldn't have been written without Klein and his archive, this smells bad. It's one thing to ignore Albert Goldman while you demolish him. Goldman was a liar and a cad. Wolff and Kempton are neither. You-are-there aesthetic or no you-are-there aesthetic, they deserve more respect—and Klein deserves less. By declining to defend Klein—and I don't assume he's indefensible—Guralnick effectively whitewashes him.

Guralnick's reluctance to polemicize doesn't merely reflect his humble subservience to the material. It also keeps him above the fray—especially the critical fray. He seems to regard himself as beyond disputation. So where his early work implied an informed version of the old blues-and-country-had-a-baby theory of rock and roll, writing about former Soul Stirrer Cooke—as in *Sweet Soul Music*, but not the Presley books—he has little choice but to emphasize rock and roll's more recently recognized gospel roots. Ex-gospel performers go pop by the dozen in *Dream Boogie*, while Guralnick's beloved blues is barely mentioned even though Cooke grew up in Muddy Waters's Chicago and sang the bejesus out of Howlin' Wolf's "Little Red Rooster." Because blues implies an outlaw ethos while gospel carries with it images of sustained social responsibility, blues-versus-gospel has become a contentious issue in rock history. Guralnick has the range and, here, opportunity to concoct a unified field theory. He doesn't.

In the end, what's most frustrating about this redolent story of a black hero killed by his irresistible attraction to—or principled refusal to abandon—"black" (or is it?) street life isn't a mere music writer's inability to convey tragic psychological imponderables. The imponderables render the book compelling in any case. Nor is it the Klein matter, which shouldn't be ignored but (as Guralnick might argue) is peripheral to Cooke's larger meaning. The frustration has to do with music. For sure, Cooke was a black hero cut down in his prime. But one must wonder whether he was also a great artist cut down in his prime. And if he wasn't, how does that inflect his heroism?

Too proud to forswear the white audience, Cooke presaged the soul style without bringing it to fruition, and his prolific songwriting, as Kempton is one of the few fans to say flat-out, mixed much corn with the likes of "Bring It on Home to Me," "Good

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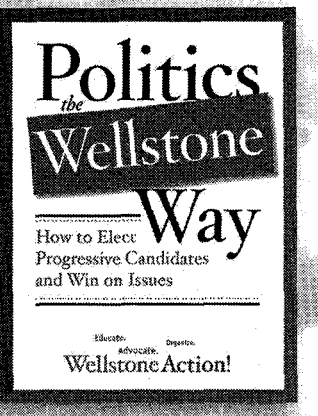

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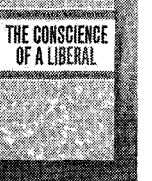

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Times" and the unquestionable masterpiece "A Change Is Gonna Come." So more than any other major rock artist—more even than Al Green or Aretha Franklin, and certainly more than any other charter member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame—his artistic power is bound up in how the individual listener responds to the physical reality of his voice. Guralnick works hard to pin down the specifics of this voice, isolating the genesis and impact of his yodel and analyzing his fusion of white-identified crooning techniques with the contained passion of his epochal Soul Stirrers predecessor, Rebert Harris. As often happens with great voices, however, he's reduced to metaphor when it comes down to cases, and they don't always suffice: "flexible and *playful*," OK, that's important, but "aching sense of loss, of *lostness*" won't ring as many bells. By now Guralnick knows Cooke's music better than almost anyone, so there's assuredly some truth value there. But it's not the kind of universal truth value Cooke aspired to. What *is* it about Sam Cooke? We still don't know.

In fact, it seems possible, despite how late Guralnick came to church music, that he's one of those who deep down prefers Cooke's Soul Stirrers recordings to his pop output. Although he has the wisdom to fight it, Guralnick is a folkie at heart, moved to his bones by pastoral versions of the simple, the true and the real. Intellectually, he gets this—he's not jiving when he praises the late Elvis milestones "In the Ghetto" and "Suspicious Minds." But emotional connection comes harder—he can explain what made "Everybody Loves to Cha Cha Cha" a hit, but designating it "irresistible" doesn't help everybody love it. This is probably why *Dream Boogie*'s assessments of Cooke's music fall short.

What kind of story would it have been if, despite some masterstrokes and a few performances like the 1963 Miami show Guralnick annotated back in 1985, the most durable art the hero left behind predated his brave crossover quest? What kind of story would it have been if the price of the cultural triumph Cooke never fully achieved was musical compromises and trial balloons his truest believers can't get their hearts around? As someone who prefers Aretha Franklin's "You Send Me" to the original, no contest, and whose own response to Cooke's voice suggests that it's about on a par with that of the young Dionne Warwick, dissed in passing by Guralnick here, I believe those are stories worth being told. And like Greil Marcus after Goldman's *Elvis*, I fear they never will be. As monumental as *Dream Boogie* is, it could have been more monumental still. ■

The Blank Verses

CHRISTINE SMALLWOOD

THE DIVINERS. By Rick Moody. Little, Brown. 567 pp. $25.95.

It's hard to get away from Rick Moody. His name—frequently mentioned in the same breath as Dave Eggers, Zadie Smith and David Foster Wallace—has been in print more than 3,000 times. He has published, since 1992, four novels, a memoir, two collections of short fiction and a great number of reviews, stories and essays. He has won a half-dozen awards and has been anthologized in collections like *The Best American Short Stories 2001*, *The Best American Essays 2004* and *Year's Best Science Fiction #9*. The secretary of the PEN American Center (and the former recipient of a PEN Martha Albrand prize), he moderates panels for *The Believer* magazine, to which he also contributes. Last year, he chaired the National Book Awards' fiction committee. He was the opening act—as a reader—on the Magnetic Fields' *69 Love Songs* tour, and he finds time to play in his own band, too. He wrote the press bio for the rock group Sleater-Kinney, and also a chapter on chord progressions and the architecture of Chicago for *The Wilco Book*. Even the Criterion Collection DVD of *Fanny and Alexander* features an essay by you-know-who. One might be forgiven for being more familiar with Moody's guest appearances than with his major works themselves.

Or at least with Dale Peck's oft-cited attack on his memoir, *The Black Veil*. The review, which appeared in the July 1, 2002, issue of *The New Republic*, memorably began by calling Moody "the worst writer of his generation." The net effect of the piece, however, was to bestow notoriety upon Peck, and to leave Moody's social calendar more or less full. Which begs the question: If Rick Moody is the worst writer of his generation, why does nobody seem to mind? Assuming that the folks at the Criterion Collection haven't lost their heads, he's probably not the *worst* writer of his generation. But he is absolutely the most overrated.

In *The Diviners*, Moody's latest—and biggest—novel, Vanessa Meandro, a grossly obese independent film producer (her company is cutely called "Means of Production"), is trying to make a miniseries about the history of dowsing, i.e., using a special stick to divine where water is in the ground. She's pitching *The Diviners* (get it?) to Jeff Maiser, a television producer whose wife is driven to a botched batch of Botox by his fling with Lacey, a teenage diva and ex–best friend of his daughter. Ranjeet, Vanessa's cab driver turned in-house television theorist, is very much in favor of the miniseries, so much so that he has stopped going home to his wife and their autistic son, Jaspreet, and has begun a halfhearted, barely consummated affair with Jeanine, the most picked-on and loneliest of Vanessa's assistants. No one can figure out who came up with the script treatment because it was secretly written by Vanessa's other assistant, Annabel Duffy, and by Thaddeus Griffin, the action star she's sleeping with, whose marriage is on the fritz, mostly due to his philandering. Annabel's brother, William, is not her real brother at all, but they are both the black adopted children of white parents, so they have that in common. William (his given name, but he prefers "Tyrone") is a schizophrenic bike messenger and a talented, though not terribly productive, artist who has been wrongly accused of putting Samantha Lee, the pretty gallery assistant, in a coma by hitting her on the head with a brick as he whizzed past on his fixed-gear. The charge is ridiculous, because she was on the phone with him when the accident happened, and he isn't like that, anyway. There's some other stuff, too, about embezzling and a Mormon investor and the Supreme Court—not to mention Vanessa's demented, alcoholic mother, who believes she's receiving wayward cell phone calls inside her brain, including some placed from Florida concerning the counting of the ballots in the 2000 presidential election—but that's the main gist of it.

As you might have guessed, the kid isn't the only one who's autistic. As you also might have guessed, most of what actually happens in *The Diviners*, like most of what actually happens in most of Rick Moody's novels, is beside the point. No matter how many pierced punk rockers or disaffected wives or disabled mothers flit across his pages, a Rick Moody novel is generally about one thing, and that is Rick Moody's ability to write very long, occasionally

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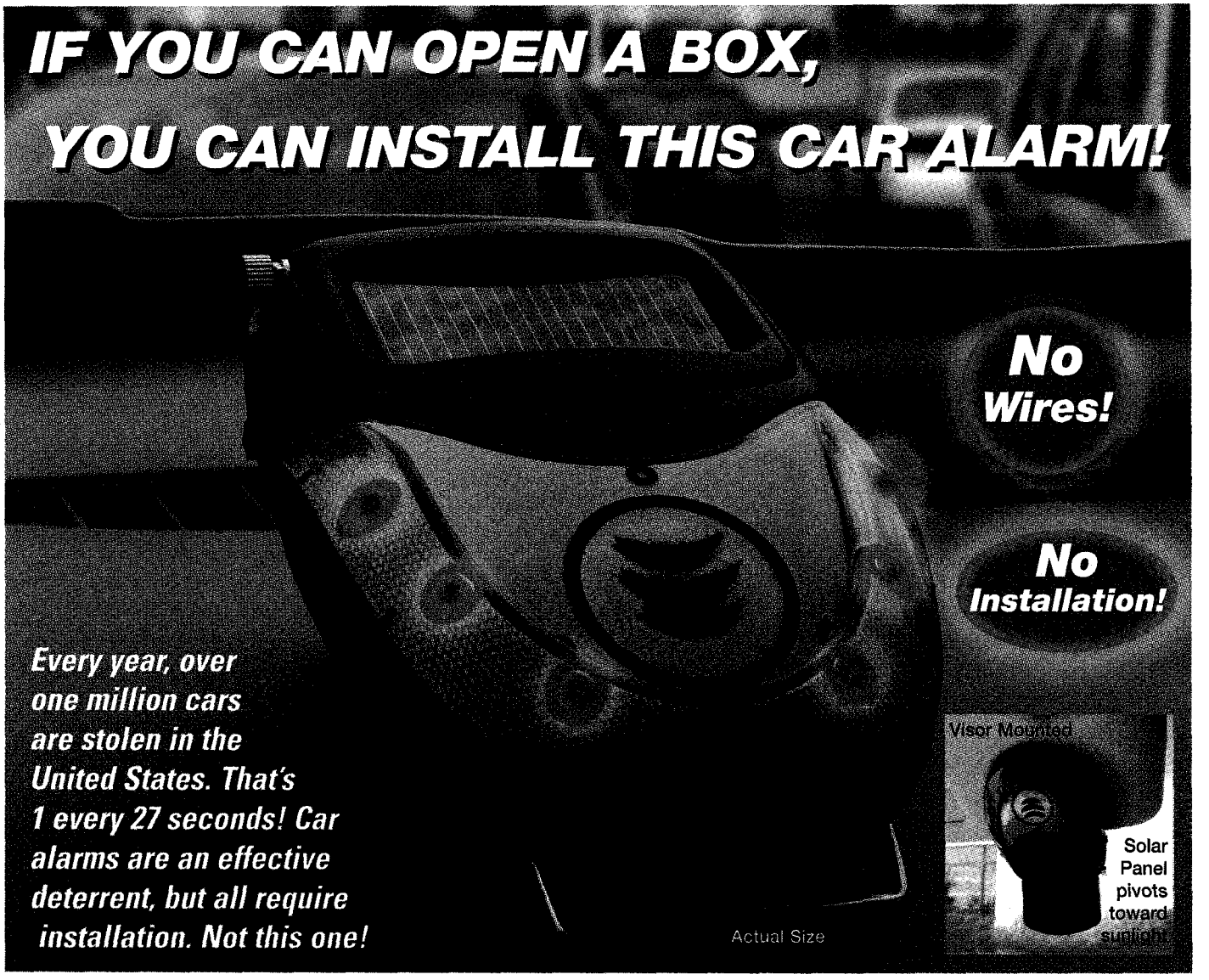
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graceful sentences. Peck put this rather nicely when he said that plots were simply there to give Moody's "tangled prose something to wrap itself around, the way a vine will wrap itself around the nearest thing to hand, be it trellis, tree, or trash."

It is these tangled, spiraling, comma-ridden sentences that Moody can thank for his remarkable ability to create and sustain a mood for hundreds of pages. He has always been good at this—each of his novels, each of his stories, is wrapped and mummified in a broad swathe of adjectives and nouns. Precious plot points—the deformed ostriches of "The Double Zero"—or implausible characters—a 14-year-old who nostalgically wishes for "a childhood in which she was a kid" in *The Ice Storm*—cannot rupture the illusion, which is not about the content of Moody's writing but its uniformity. That the tone of this uniformity is smug—one can almost hear Moody cracking his knuckles with pleasure after completing a particularly florid line—does not diminish its effect.

The Diviners is his best novel to date—I have, however, thrown down in frustration every other book he's written, including *The Ice Storm*, which certain otherwise perfectly sane people consider a work of art. (It is not, although Tobey Maguire, who stars in the movie version, is really, really cute.) So when I say that *The Diviners* is Rick Moody's best novel, what I mean is that it is his least annoying novel; at times, it's even sort of fun. And to its eternal credit, it stays away from the suburbs, which, if his previous novels are any guide, the balding Brooklynite would just as soon blow up before he would depict as a place where anything happens that isn't stultifyingly alienating and/or small-minded. But this occasionally entertaining rant about commercialism, excess, media, waste, loneliness, obesity and the central place of television in American life is not only vast and ambitious in scope; it is also bloated, repetitive, rambling, gurgling, churning and miserably undeveloped. *The Diviners* shoots for the epic but never transcends the cartoonish. His most intricate and pleasing stage, his most exhaustive backdrop, it lays bare the limits of his prose.

Since *Garden State*, his first novel, Moody has been keenly interested in the problem of communication. His characters either will not or cannot speak to one another. This works on a metaphorical level (the adolescent monosyllables of *Garden State*; the frigidity and sullenness of *The Ice Storm*) as well as a practical one (Hex's stutter and his mother's verbal incapacitation in *Purple America*). In *The Diviners* he goes all out: one demented alcoholic; one autistic child; one schizophrenic; and one girl in a coma. (Even the BlackBerry, that tool of instant messaging, telephoning and e-mailing, is the site of ponderously "impenetrable secrets.") Having created characters who are effectively mute, Moody assigns to his omniscient narrators the task of translating their thoughts—thereby relieving himself of the novelistic task of creating unique, or even convincing, voices.

When Annabel films her family, for example, Moody speaks for the silent camera: "He [Max] has on the baggy jeans, and he has on his so-called wife-beater, and he has donned the jewelry." The image calls to mind a certain type of adolescent male, but not in the voice of a smart, sensitive young black woman obsessed with the Marquis de Sade. It is in the voice of a thirtysomething white writer who uses "the"s like little speed bumps in his sentences. Why the "so-called wife-beater"? Why the clever distance, the subtle condescension? Why must his narrators always be, to ape his abuse of italics, so *insufferably self-satisfied*? Why are they always *getting in the way*?

Having created characters who are effectively mute, Moody relieves himself of the task of creating unique, or even convincing, voices.

Ultimately, Moody is less interested in articulating the thoughts of his characters than in giving us his own thoughts in his own language. (Attentive readers will note similarities between Moody the interview subject and Moody the narrator.) The voice of a generation, he speaks for them and on top of them, sliding in and out of their heads. Their blankness is a screen on which he projects his own ideas.

This wouldn't be so bad if his ideas were of any interest. (Sample thesis statement from *The Diviners*: The entertainment industry is full of creeps.) Unfortunately, Moody uses his vast vocabulary and advanced grammar, his literary pulpit, to tell us things we already know—movie stars are sleazy; police detectives like doughnuts; television shows are, generally, pretty stupid—and to tell us them over and over, forward and backward, through each and every character. Different faces and accents come and go in *The Diviners*, but nearly everybody thinks the same: Vanessa's interior monologue sounds an awful lot like that of Thaddeus, who resembles Ranjeet, who is quite similar to Tyrone, who echoes Jaspreet, who is, in case you've forgotten, mentally ill. In this menagerie of the lonely and the broken, the well-meaning and the just-getting-by, Moody gives us a book with the complexity of a freshman psych class and a case of multiple-personality disorder.

Moody has long had a penchant for biblical language and scriptural reference. (He even co-edited a collection of essays on the New Testament, *Joyful Noise*.) The first chapter of *Purple America*, which features—much like the first chapters of *The Diviners*, come to think of it—a seriously ill, neglected and abandoned mother being cared for by her wayward grown child, is shrouded in the language of the Gospels: "Whosoever...shall never die" (John 3:15) is the constant refrain.

"The light that illuminates the world begins in Los Angeles," solemnly intones the first sentence of *The Diviners*.

> Begins in darkness, begins in the mountains, begins in empty landscapes, in doubt and remorse. San Antonio Peak throws shadows upon a city of shadows. There are hints of human insignificance; there are nightmares. But just at the moment of intolerability there's an eruption of spectra. It's morning! In the East! Morning is hopeful, uncomplicated, and it scales mountaintops, as it scales all things.

Is morning uncomplicated? Does it scale all things? Eleven pages of sunrise later, it seems that morning's reach is pretty far, but it's still not clear why we needed the exclamation points. Instead of plumbing the depths of meaning, enhancing understanding or appreciation, this high-flown language—the language of faith, the language of previews—prevents readers from discerning what Moody thinks. It's a neat trick. It saves him the trouble of figuring it out.

Moody likes to have it both ways, cutting earnestness with irony, grandeur with derision. And it's not limited to religious rhetoric: His screen of allusions and manic free flow, his wordy, associative narration, work to obscure his meaning at every turn. Every object and feeling, every moment, is a door to be opened, a hat out of which he'll pull anything—really, anything. A female orgasm in *Purple America*, for example, calls to mind "silk flowers, rice paper, dusk in summer, *chamber music, night swimming, penny candy*." Moody consistently chooses abundance over precision; in his world,

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more is more. (*The Diviners* ends with an "Epilogue and Scenes From Upcoming Episodes"—this instead of, say, an ending to the *current* episode.)

This compulsive list-making partly reflects an emphasis on spontaneity and excess over sparseness, obliqueness over direct representation—but it's mostly just sloppy. After all, it is one thing for a passage to feel extemporaneous, and another for it to be written carelessly. The centripetal force of the prose in *The Diviners* fails to suggest the madness or interconnectedness or impossibility of all things that it so badly wants to imply; it merely suggests that the author hasn't bothered to undertake the writerly task of rereading, or rewriting, his own work.

Moody's expansive vocabulary notwithstanding, his characters are essentially flat, something his leave-no-adjective-behind descriptions strain to conceal. Consider, for instance, the passage where Samantha, the coma-ridden gallery assistant, regains her memory at the mention of Tyrone's name. Moody's description begins well enough:

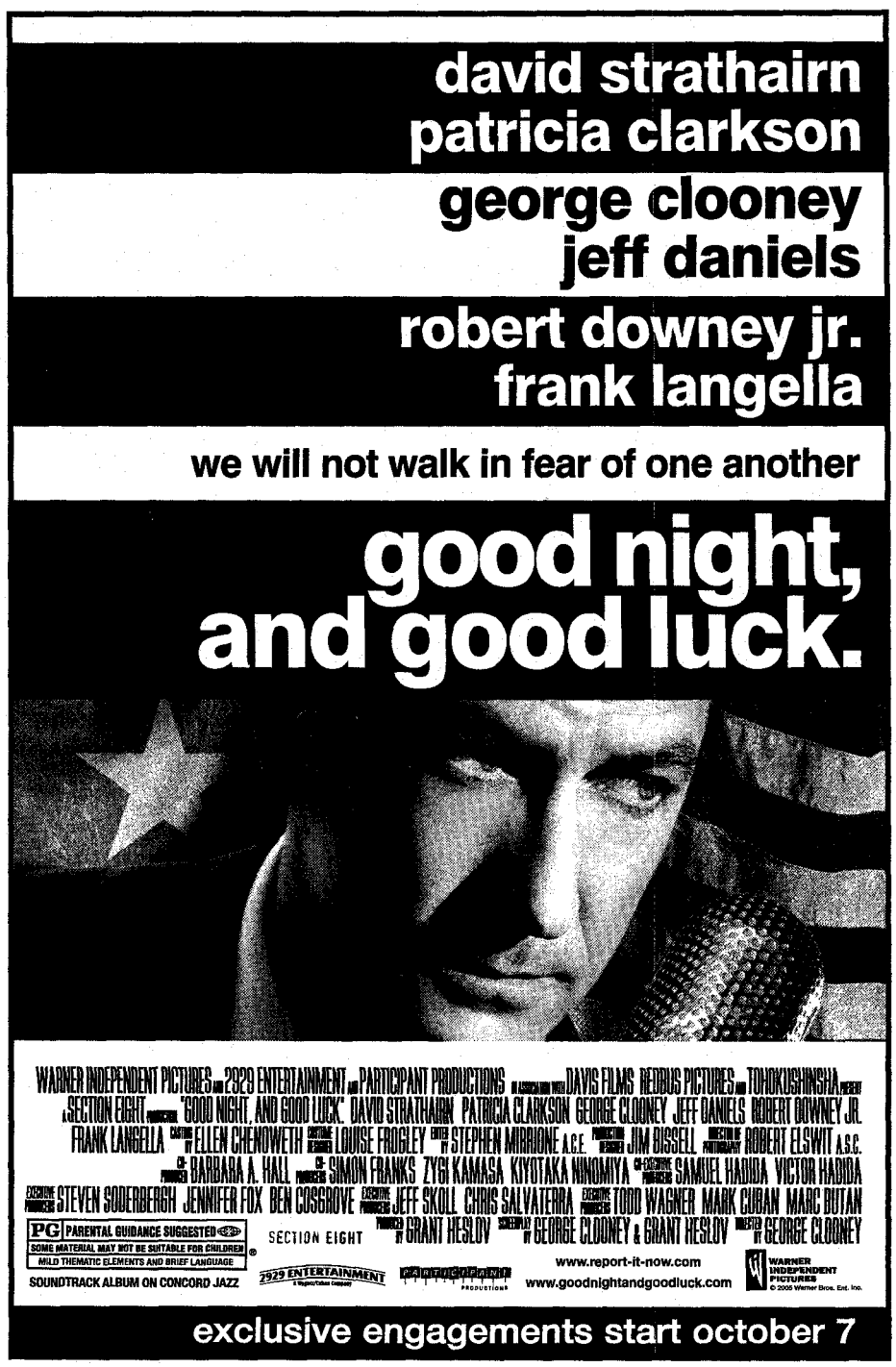
> At the sound of the name, something happens in her. It is as if a whole second window of consciousness opens up. It is the window onto ornament, onto all the things that are inessential on their surface, and yet, when this window is reopened, she wonders how she lived without it, because in here are consigned the memories with no names attached to them, such as riding down the FDR in a taxi at night with the windows open in spring. How beautiful this memory is, and how beautiful are the lights, and how excellent is the FDR drive.

It's an evocative passage—the window opening up; the memories with no names—and even the intrusion of Moody's "how excellent is" is offset by the simplicity, the reserve, of the image. But he doesn't shut up and let us enjoy the moment. He keeps going:

> Likewise, the memory of the leaves changing color in the suburbs in autumn, and the memory of ballet class as a girl, and what it felt like to lace up her toe shoes, and also the memory of the taste of ice cream, especially mint-chocolate-chip ice cream.... and the smell of people's lunch bags in elementary school, and what it felt like to climb the ropes in gym.... and the satisfying sound that a videocassette made the first time she ever fed one into a machine.

And on and on. Not one of Samantha's memories—her unlikely recollection of the entire history of art aside—could not be the memories of any other female character. "What it felt like to lace up her toe shoes"—maybe we'd like to know how it felt? The "sound that a videocassette made"—which video? We are no closer to understanding who, or why, or how Samantha is than we were when she was unconscious. As in some game of literary pin the tail on the donkey, Moody has thrown a bunch of ideas at her in the hopes that one will stick, but he hasn't brought her to life—he hasn't rendered her as an individual. And even when he does succeed in giving his characters tics, they are just that, *tics*, not traits, and so willfully odd (Vanessa must eat a doughnut from every Krispy Kreme franchise in the city of New York) as to be not charmingly kooky but unbelievable. That which is interesting is routinely forsaken for that which is merely wacky.

These wouldn't be problems if Moody were writing in a postmodern tradition, in which information—encyclopedic footnotes, complicated chemical formulae—supersedes or replaces traditional subjectivity. But he is a more old-fashioned writer, with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more old-fashioned concerns. His novels want to revolve around character, but the arty self-consciousness of his prose prevents them from doing so. You can only wonder what might happen if Moody applied his energy to crafting characters other than his narrators—which is to say, other than himself. The result might no longer be a Rick Moody novel. But it would make for much better reading. ■

FILMS

Anywhere But Here

STUART KLAWANS

OCCUPATION: DREAMLAND • TIM BURTON'S CORPSE BRIDE

Although *Occupation: Dreamland* was filmed entirely in Falluja, only two of its three main settings are Iraqi. Those places are the shadowless streets, their bleached yellow walls huddling together on a dusty plain, seen in long shot during daylight hours; and the murky interiors of houses, shot after sundown with a night-scope to yield shaky, close-up, glowing-green views. The third principal setting, by contrast, might as well be a lamp-lit American dormitory, cluttered with rumpled beds and wallpapered with pinup photos. This is the barracks of the 82nd Airborne's Alpha Company, 1/505.

Here the soldiers feel sufficiently at home to talk about their discomfort—their contempt, despair and rage—at stepping into foreign spaces. "I was never out of the country before, except for booze runs to fuckin' Mexico," marvels Pfc. Thomas Turner, expressing a commonly held sense of disbelief. Like many of his buddies, he says he never imagined that enlistment in the Army would result in his being sent to someplace strange and dangerous. You have no cause to doubt that his frayed ingenuousness is real, or that Sgt. Eric Forbes is voicing an equally common response to this posting when he says of Falluja, "I hate these people."

Forbes makes that comment soon after a fellow soldier has died in a roadside bombing, so you may take the remark as no more than situational. Forbes seems to have no existential loathing for Iraqis—in fact, he describes them as caught haplessly in the way, as the United States lunges for oil—but whatever hostility he's sparked in Falluja, he will return it, and with twice the firepower. At their most gung-ho, soldiers like Forbes think of combat as a release from the tension of policing the Iraqis. "I like bein' shot at. It makes it interesting," claims Staff Sgt. Ryan Mish, who says that sometimes "I just want to light everybody up." On the more mature end of the scale, the soldiers regard the occupation as an end in itself, self-perpetuating and self-enclosed. "What are we securing here?" asks Capt. Terence Caliguire at a staff briefing. "We're securing essentially ourselves. So what are we protecting? I don't know."

Shot in January and February 2004 by Garrett Scott and Ian Olds, this admirably direct and spare documentary is the second feature released this year to record the lives of American soldiers in Iraq. It follows Petra Epperlein and Michael Tucker's *Gunner Palace*, which was shot in Baghdad at almost the same time (autumn 2003–winter 2004), and which focused on soldiers in the 2/3 Field Artillery. At the risk of sounding heartless, I will describe *Gunner Palace* as the more entertaining of the films. It dwells on the surrealism of the Field Artillery's having billeted itself in a bombed-out pleasure palace, and it makes the most of the soldiers' desire to play to the camera. Freestyle rappers, poets and platoon flakes are much in evidence. Also, while it presents a thoroughly unsentimental view of the war, *Gunner Palace* gives a varied account of the occupiers. You sometimes see them trying hard to help Iraqis; you witness moments of generosity and even tenderness.

Occupation: Dreamland is a drier experience, and a more somber one. Its lightest scene records how one GI tries good-heartedly to converse in phrase-book Arabic, despite getting stuck at "*Salaam aleikum*." In a more touching sequence, Spc. Patrick Napoli uses an Army manual to drill his squad in sign language. The soldiers work hard at it, and Napoli expresses pride in momentarily being a

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leader. But he adds, "I'm in Iraq. It's a little late for a sign language class."

That's as hopeful as it gets in *Occupation: Dreamland*, a picture in which most of the soldiers admit to having enlisted for lack of anything better to do, and now find they have nothing to look forward to other than self-preservation. Why the sense of futility? The reason becomes clear whenever Arabs take over the scene (as they never do in *Gunner Palace*), to deliver extended, impromptu street tirades against the occupation. They shout at the soldiers through an overburdened interpreter, and they shout at the filmmakers, too. You're not in Baghdad any longer, the men warn. "This is Falluja. Be careful of Falluja."

And why should the foreigners be careful of this particular place? On this subject, *Occupation: Dreamland* is silent, Scott and Olds having chosen to present only what they recorded themselves, during one slice of time. So, if you rely solely on the words spoken in the film, you might conclude that Falluja is populated by principled anticolonialists, or perhaps tradition-bound paternalists. (There was much outrage on the streets, when Scott and Olds were in town, about the Americans having taken a woman into custody.) On the other hand, if you've absorbed some of the news media's standard phrases about Falluja—Sunni Triangle, Baath loyalists—you might write off much of the anger as the rage of a corrupt minority at losing power.

Or perhaps you know more. Maybe you've read of how Saddam Hussein wasn't all that fond of Falluja, whose clerics had been annoyingly independent. Maybe you can even remember how Falluja, though correspondingly cool toward Saddam, became a center of insurgency. In April 2003, just three weeks after US tanks entered Baghdad, American troops opened fire on a protest march in Falluja, killing a reported fifteen people and wounding seventy-five. After that, the citizens were dead set against Americans—a piece of information that was highly relevant to Alpha Company, and might be relevant to your understanding of its soldiers, but cannot be gleaned from *Occupation: Dreamland*.

In short, you have to bring your own context to the picture, which is that much poorer for its own stinginess. I would not stress this complaint, except that every record we can get of the occupation is crucial. Fighting is no longer beamed into everyone's living room as it was during the Vietnam War. The pictures are now available mostly to the funny people who visit art houses and rent obscure DVDs, or who might tune in to a premium cable channel that's showing *Gunner Palace* or *Occupation: Dreamland*. Precisely because this core audience is limited, the information in the documentaries shouldn't be. Every new viewer who stumbles across these films is statistically significant.

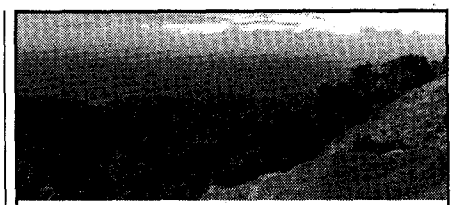
That said, Scott and Olds can claim the integrity of having given you just what they saw and heard themselves during six weeks in residence with Alpha Company. The material may be fragmentary and ambiguous by nature, but it was hard won, and it has an undeniable force. This is what it's like to be bored, itchy, angry, isolated, underprepared and far outnumbered among a foreign people who hate you. This is what many of us arthouse types will never know firsthand.

The title character of Tim Burton's latest movie has a radiant smile, part of which is visible through the gaping hole in her left cheek. Her figure is lush, except where eaten away. Her eyes are large and expressive, though the right one often falls out, providing egress for a worm who lives in her skull. Although her nature is musical, her pianism is slightly marred by the tapping of bones against the keys.

She is (to use the full name) *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride*; and as you can tell from even a brief description, it is not entirely a joke for a living man to be bound to her.

Her appearance so soon after *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is welcome evidence of a return to form for Burton, whose greatest gift may be a talent for jesting seriously. When he's off his form, the humor may turn into sentimental whimsy (as in *Big Fish*), or the seriousness become lumpishly grotesque (witness *Sleepy Hollow*). But in this summer's *Charlie*, aided by his longtime collaborator Johnny Depp, Burton has toyed giddily with the line between reward and punishment. (Every river of chocolate has its undertow for the unwary; every child's downfall is celebrated in psychedelic song.) In *Corpse Bride*, the terms have shifted somewhat—we're now dealing with the line between desire and revulsion—but Burton continues to play jump-rope with the border, and Depp still does much of the skipping.

The story, though told through stop-motion animation, may be better suited to adults than children, not only because of those flesh-eating worms but because so much of it has to do with cash-poor aristocrats and wealthy, parvenu merchants—a dauntingly nineteenth-century theme for most kids, especially when the exposition is given through Danny Elfman's patter songs. So if you intend to frighten your favorite little ones with *Corpse Bride*, be pre-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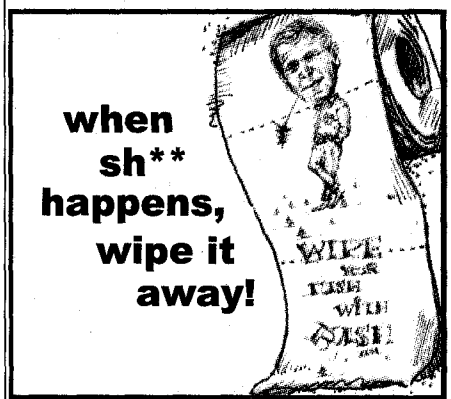

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pared to explain that skinny, poetic Victor (voice of Depp) is being married off to sad, lonely Victoria (voice of Emily Watson) so that his family may be elevated from its status as fishmongers and hers may pay the upkeep on the ancestral mansion. Yet even though the marriage is forced and the surroundings gloomy—the whole town is a sooty gray—romance blossoms. Victor and Victoria fall in love at first sight; but when, at the wedding rehearsal, the inept groom repeatedly flubs his vows, he makes the terrible mistake of wandering off alone to practice. Deep in the forest, under cover of darkness, he at last says the formula correctly—and so marries the unfortunate virgin (voice of Helena Bonham Carter) who has been lying underfoot for many years, buried in a rotting wedding dress.

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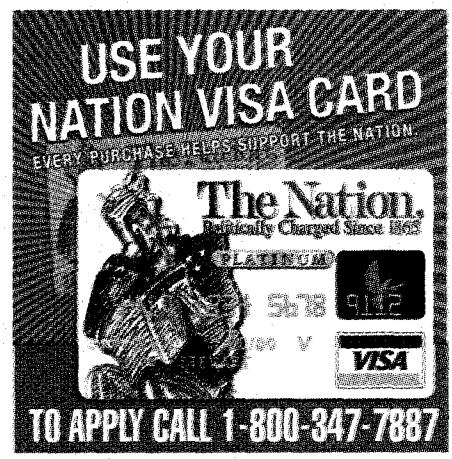
Burton co-directed *Corpse Bride* with Mike Johnson. The screenplay is credited to John August, Caroline Thompson and Pamela Pettler. Alex McDowell was production designer, and the cinematographer was Pete Kozachik. Lifting my head gently off the neck, I tip my skull to them all. ■



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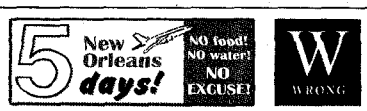

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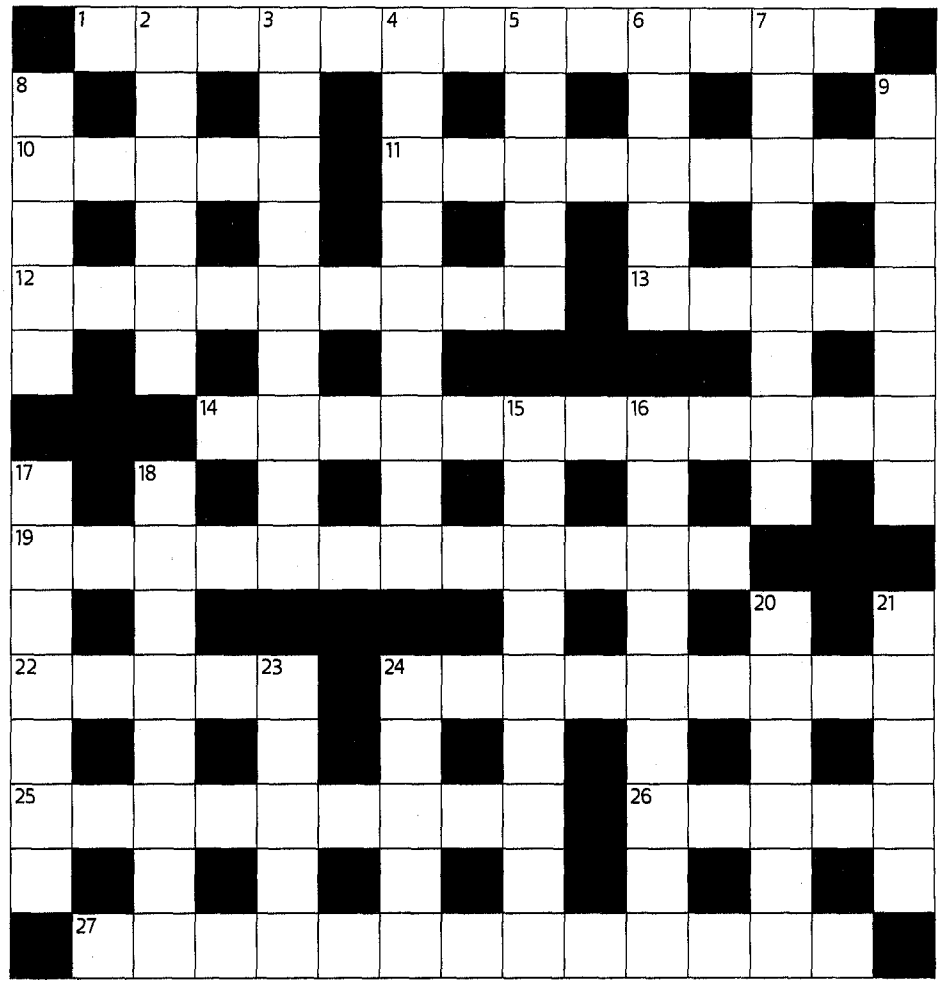

ACROSS

1 Does it imply that application of lipstick might be required after osculation, to prove that all is well? (4,3,4,2)

10 It offers a certain amount of latitude for an outburst of anger. (5)

11 Couldn't find the reason for a position without much chance of acceptance. (4,5)

12 Relating to the planning of difficult targets with a little less than a hundred, according to the Romans. (9)

13 Improper steps to take when looking for branches of the clan. (5)

14 Lamb might be responsible for such a humorous expression, the result of an embarrassing experience. (8,4)

19 Day equivalent literally to Y? (12)

22 Get the blokes out of uniform, the way the British did! (As Capone might say, "the gang"!) (5)

24 Desire nominally to be reached by one? (9)

25 The main one up, perhaps—but you won't feel good with it! (9)

26 Measured by the clock backward, as a way to leave the office. (5)

27 Lied badly, with Tom having unusual senses of pastrami and such coming from these. (13)

DOWN

2 Overlook, possibly, where a gin sling has what is associated with mine. (6)

3 What one does in too warm an environment at what the teenagers once called a dance, where everyone works too hard. (5-4)

4 Judging by the color, where Moses was found capable of being an engineer, around 50. (4,5)

5 Is it a savage breast or a savage beast that this is said to soothe? (5)

6 Complaints one was supposed to get on Route 66. (5)

7 If those who take an unusual interest in dealing with things are middling quiet, they take over. (8)

8 Not a first-class exposure to hazard for the quick and active. (5)

9 and **21** "Glad to have ya!" might be heard by those who are. (7,5)

15 Probably not capable of walking straight, after you've found a beer in it, perhaps. (9)

16 Places for Juan and Juanita, and each is different. (9)

17 Pitchers might have them before stuff is poured over the plate. (4-3)

18 George Eliot was responsible for having a bed made so untidily. (4,4)

20 Reputedly a comer on the stage? (6)

21 See 9

23 If you heard the clue, you might think it was a little dear! (5)

24 The devil is twisted into quite the opposite—ho ho! (5)

PUZZLED? No more cross words. If you don't see why "Lures" are "Ground Rules" send for those of Mr. Lewis to: Puzzled, The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003, or access our website at www.thenation.com/about/crossword.mhtml.

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		S	H	I	R	T	B	U	T	T	O	N		
	T		U		U		O		O		N		B	
B	R	I	C	K	B	A	T		R	E	E	L	E	D
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O	S	I	E	R	S		S	K	E	P	T	I	C	S
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C	L	O	S	E	T	E	D		C	R	E	D	I	T
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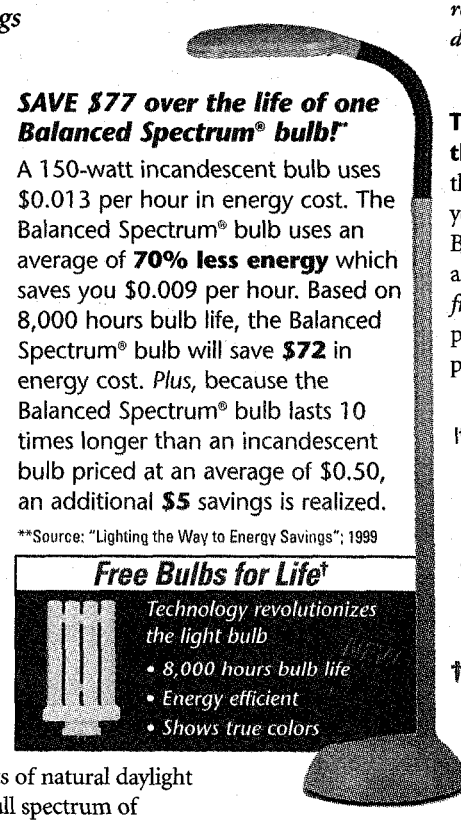
**Source: "Lighting the Way to Energy Savings"; 1999



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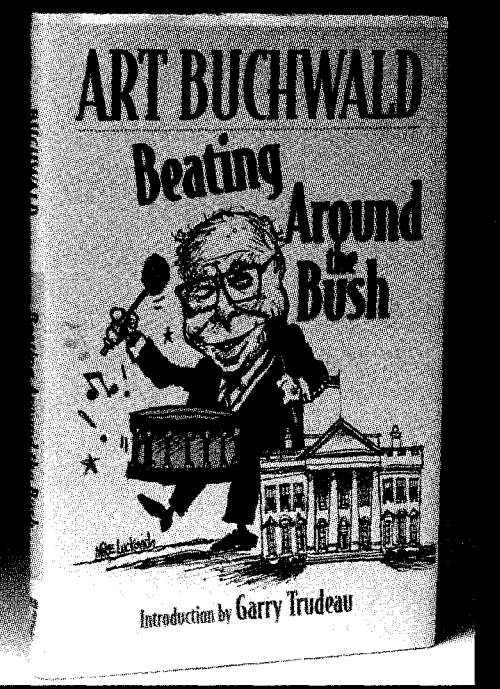

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